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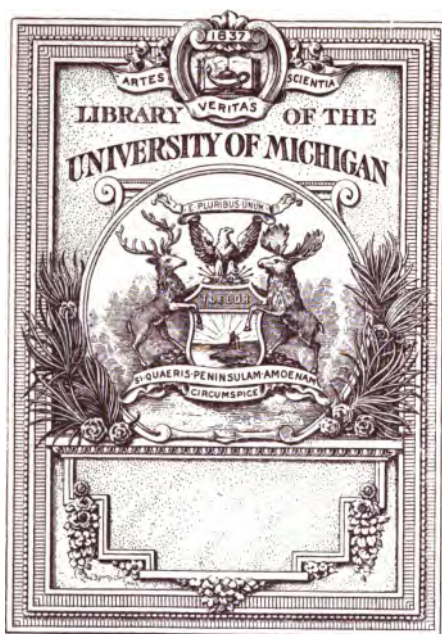
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The Higher Agnosticism

Frederic H. Balfour



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THE HIGHER AGNOSTICISM

THE HIGHER AGNOSTICISM

BY
FREDERIC H. BALFOUR
AUTHOR OF "UNTHINKABLES"



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Rome, Jerusalem, & an Ideal

WHETHER the course of history could conceivably have been different from what we know it actually was, is a question which will be generally answered in the negative. And that by two opposing parties. The Christian will deny it on the ground that everything is ordained by God, who knows all things from the beginning; the materialist will trace the unbroken chain of cause and effect which exists as much in the mental world as in the physical, and entirely excludes free will. The empiricist, of course, flouts logic and providence alike, and appeals to daily experience. A man, he tells you, out for a walk in the country, comes to a spot where two roads

meet, either of which will lead him home. Unable to make up his mind between them, he spins a halfpenny, and turns down the one indicated by the coin's fall. Had he taken the other, he would have reached his house in safety with an excellent appetite for dinner, led a prosperous and happy life, and died eventually at eighty. As chance decides, however, he chooses a different route, meets a mad dog, gets badly bitten, and after weeks of mental anguish dies the ghastliest and most hideous death we know of. What law, asks our empiricist, determined whether that fateful halfpenny should come down head or tail?

Ex uno disce omnes. If the present writer had not chanced, some years ago, to stroll down to a certain reading-room in a Far Eastern metropolis, and, again by chance, to read a certain article in a Review, the whole tenor of his life would have been different from what it is. And what is true in the experience of individuals is true in the history of nations. It is not our present purpose to

discuss Determinism, in either its theological or materialistic aspect ; the problem it presents would lead us altogether too far afield. Whether it be a divinity that shapes our ends rough-hew them how we will, or some less intelligent but equally resistless power that rough-hews them however we may try to shape them, is a question that lies outside the scope of our argument. But that phenomena of far-reaching and stupendous import are often traceable to the most trivial sources is a truism so palpable as to stand in no need of proof. There are cases in which the great departure has taken its rise from some idea suddenly coming, all unsought, into some man's brain ; almost literally coming into it, as though reaching it, like an arrow, from outside. There are often cases in which no such origination has taken place, the genesis and development of events being unnoticed, gradual, and to all appearance the incidental result of totally unrelated forces. It is one such case that we propose to consider in the present essay, and we intend further to

inquire what would have been the condition of the world to-day had there been the initial idea, the definite mental act, the inspired foresight, on the part of some man or men, which would have turned the course of history into a different channel altogether. The subject of our speculation will be the Christian Church ; and the question we propose to consider—What would have been the history and present condition of Christianity if the headquarters of the faith had been located, not in Rome, but in Jerusalem ?

Now it is clearly evident, from what we read in the Acts of the Apostles, the Revelation of St. John, and the Epistles of Paul, Peter, John, Ignatius, Barnabas, Clement, and Polycarp, that no such idea as that of a headquarters or metropolis of the Christian religion existed in either apostolic or sub-apostolic times. And we commit ourselves to this statement in full remembrance of the fact that an appeal was once actually made to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem concerning a dispute that threatened to bring about a very

serious schism, and that that appeal might plausibly be regarded as a most important precedent by any who wished to prove that for a certain term of years Jerusalem was *de facto* the metropolis of the nascent faith. The argument loses much of its force, however, when we recollect that St. Paul, the appellant in the cause, distinctly repudiated any superiority or authority that might be claimed by, or attributed to, the heads of the Jerusalem community. The one aim of the primitive diffusers of Christianity was to make converts and establish congregations. The congregations so formed were termed churches, and the word church was applied to any assembly, however small, of Christians in a given place. Even the presence of three or four converts in a private household, such as that of Aristobulus, of Aquila and Priscilla, of Narcissus, of the Roman Emperor himself, constituted a church ; while among the larger and more formally compacted communities we are familiar with the church at Ephesus, the church at Antioch, the church at Jeru-

salem, the church at Rome, the church at Sardis, the church at Thyatira, the church at Philippi, the church at Magnesia, the church at Pergamos, and the church at Corinth. Each of these churches was subject to a resident bishop, or elder, whose authority over his flock was supreme; and each was independent and as far as possible self-supporting, owing no allegiance to any other church or being accountable to anybody whatsoever outside its own geographical limits. While the apostles lived, of course—the men who had received their commission from the Lord Himself—they exercised a moral and spiritual influence to which no converts could lay claim; but they were neither bishops nor archbishops, they wielded no local jurisdiction—for the James who appears to have occupied the position of supreme authority in the church at Jerusalem was not one of the Twelve—and the principle that we now call Congregationalism held undisputed sway. Each church was self-governing; decisions as to the administra-

tion of church funds, regulation of church services, infliction of church discipline, even, in later times, styles of church architecture, were arrived at in untrammelled independence guided by local customs and conveniences, and all apostolic intervention was confined to exhortations of a purely spiritual and edifying nature. Nor was any move made towards centralization when the last of the apostles died. Not only had St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. John never in a single instance enjoined upon any church the duty of submitting or deferring to any other church; the loss of even these supreme leaders never seems to have suggested to those who were left behind the expediency of recognising a Central Power, an acknowledged seat of authority, which should bind the churches together now that the inspired voices had been silenced. The Epistles of Ignatius afford a curious and striking illustration of this fact. Subjection to the bishop, and to no one else, is the keynote of his ecclesiastical system. "That, being subject to your bishop and the pres-

bytery, ye may be wholly and thoroughly sanctified," he writes to the Ephesians. "Wherefore it will become you to run together according to the will of your bishop, as also ye do ; for your famous presbytery, worthy of God, is fitted as exactly to the bishop as the strings are to a harp. . . . How much more must I think you happy, who are so joined to your bishop as the church is to Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ to the Father?" "It is evident that we ought to look upon the bishop even as we would do upon the Lord Himself." In his letter to the Magnesians, he warns them against behaving too familiarly towards their own bishop on account of his comparative youth ; he praises the Trallians for subjecting themselves to the bishop Polybius as to Jesus Christ ; strikes the same note though in a different key in his epistle to the Philadelphians ; and draws a highly coloured and very elaborate picture of the episcopal functions in writing to the church at Smyrna. The bishop, in fine, is the supreme authority

in every separate church, and while there are general exhortations to unity and warnings against schism there is not a trace of any difference in status between one church and another. Smyrna is never enjoined to submit itself to Rome, or Rome to Antioch, or Antioch to Jerusalem. Nothing, certainly, was ever further from St. Paul's mind than to tell the Corinthians or the Philippians that they must acknowledge the supremacy of St. Peter. And if any brother had been ill-advised enough to suggest to St. Paul that to withstand the Prince of the Apostles to his face, judging him to be blamed, was an act of heretical impudence, we may be permitted to surmise that the retort of the Apostle to the Gentiles would have been more forcible than polite. In like manner it never entered the head of Polycarp, Barnabas, or Ignatius to set up one church above another, or to pick out Rome, Jerusalem, Antioch, or Ephesus as possessing an authority, or standard of orthodoxy, to which all must bow on pain of a charge of schism.

In fact, the expectation that the Lord was about to reappear in a very short time no doubt prevented the apostles and their immediate successors from making any such provision for a seat of permanent authority as would involve the establishment of what may be termed a spiritual or ecclesiastical metropolis.

And for centuries the same equality continued, in theory at any rate. The ancient churches in many cases disappeared—their candlesticks were removed and others took their place—heresies arose in abundance, and bishops excommunicated bishops, but not one was recognised as exercising supremacy over the others. The Bishop of Rome was not regarded as more than *primus inter pares*, and that only by reason of the incidental growth in prestige of the church he represented. As late as the end of the sixth century Pope Gregory the Great himself denounced as Antichrist any prelate who should dare to assume so blasphemous a style as that of Universal Bishop. “No one of

my predecessors," thundered the Pope, "ever consented to use so profane a title. This title 'Universal Bishop' is profane, superstitious, haughty, and invented by the First Apostate. I confidently affirm that whoso calls himself, or desires to be called, Universal Bishop, in his pride goeth before Antichrist." If, when Gregory said this, he was speaking *ex cathedrâ* (as we must suppose) and therefore infallibly, the position of his successors from Hildebrand downwards has been equivocal, to say the least of it. Not even the late lamented Dr. Cumming went further in his denunciation of claims advanced by two hundred occupants of the Papal Chair than did one of the greatest Popes who ever reigned. And when we remember the part played by certain Forged Decretals in establishing the supremacy subsequently arrogated to the Papacy by Pope Gregory the Seventh, and preserved to the present day, one cannot help wondering what Pope Gregory the First would have said to such proceedings, could he have foreseen the future.

And so it came to pass, as we all know, in the course of time, that the Church at Rome was acknowledged supreme in Christendom, and, like Aaron's rod, swallowed up the others. It is not necessary for our purpose to enumerate the various causes which led to this consummation. The fact is all we have to deal with—the fact that, from at any rate the eleventh century down to the sixteenth, Rome was regarded by almost the whole world as the headquarters of Christianity, and is still acknowledged as such by two hundred million souls.

But now, suppose it had been otherwise. Suppose the apostles, foreseeing the diffusion of the new religion, had organised a central church from the beginning, an ecclesiastical or religious metropolis, a place of final authority and resort, such as Mecca is to Mohammedanism, such as Mount Moriah was to Judaism, such, in short, as Rome is to-day to Romanism. And suppose—what is not altogether absurd—that they had fixed upon Jerusalem. It was the place where

Christ had died, risen, and ascended, the place where Christianity had been preached first, the place from which the earliest missionaries had gone forth. It enjoyed the prestige of having been the seat and centre of divinely appointed worship for centuries, and an appeal had undeniably been made to the Triumvirate assembled there on an important point of Christian discipline, an appeal which, so far, might be regarded as an acknowledgment of the Holy City as the seat of supreme authority. Everything, in fact, seemed to point to Jerusalem as the natural headquarters of the religion that was destined to supersede Judaism, and to Mount Moriah as the site of the great Mother Church that should replace the Jewish Temple. That Jerusalem was to undergo a terrible siege and other tribulations could scarcely have been foreseen, or, if the predictions of Christ to this effect were not altogether forgotten, there was nothing to prove that the very devastation itself was not intended to purge the city of its

unbelief and prepare it for a loftier career. What, then, we may ask, would have been some of the consequences ensuing from the choice of Jerusalem as the metropolis of Christendom had that choice been made?

We think that, in the first place, there would have been no Protestantism. By this of course we do not mean that the doctrines distinctively called Protestant would not have been held. We mean that there would have been no disruption, no revolt, no passionate repudiation of the Church's claim to be the True Church founded on Christ and His Apostles. The historico-geographical argument would have been too strong. At present men may ask, with considerable show of reason, what Christ has to do with Rome, of all places; why Rome, more than Constantinople or Berlin? and whether He really intended His Vicars to be chosen almost exclusively from a close corporation of Italian priests? But with the Church centred on Mount Moriah there could have been no such questionings. It was there,

according to tradition, that Abraham attempted to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice to God. It was there that was situated the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, which David purchased as a site for the Temple. It was on that mysterious and venerable Rock that the Temples of Solomon, of Nehemiah, and of Herod were successively erected—the only authorised seat of divine worship from the tenth century before Christ till the year 70 of the Christian era. No Christian imagination could have withstood such accumulated prestige as this. However corrupt the Church might have become, no one would or could have doubted that it was the Church actually founded by the Apostles, and that to set up a rival sanctuary would be to repeat the schism of Jeroboam the First. The Temple worship under Manasseh and other degenerate kings became, as we know, infected with the vilest practices and idolatries of the most repulsive kind, and we know also, as a fact, that there were pious Jews who were horrified at the

degradation of the State religion, and regarded the priesthood of their day with mingled indignation and contempt. Yet we do not read that these men repudiated the religion itself, still less that they set up a rival Temple where the worship should be pure. Defiled as the Temple was, it was still the house that Jahveh had appointed for .Himself, and they had no authority to worship Him elsewhere. In like manner no Christian would under any circumstances have ventured to break away from the Church which we are supposing to have replaced the Temple upon Mount Moriah, in view of its illustrious ancestry and unquestionably Apostolic origin.

In the second place, there would have been no Romanism. By this we mean that the doctrines distinctively associated with the Church of Rome would never have come into being. In other words, there would have been no paganization of Christianity, no adoption by the Church of pagan practices, no assimilation of pagan festivals, pagan

deities, and pagan rites under new names. When Rome fell, after its siege by Alaric the Goth, it was found politic, if not imperatively necessary, to conciliate those who attributed the public disasters to the indignation of the long-neglected gods, and an extensive paganization of Christianity was the result. Heathen temples were allowed to stand, and heathen rites were adapted to the new religion. The institutions of antiquity were preserved, and flourished under a different nomenclature. Mariolatry is thus distinctly traceable to the worship of Ceres ; the statue of Jupiter did duty as a representation of the Jew Peter ; an image of the incestuous Agrippina with the infant Nero in her arms was for some time worshipped as that of the Virgin and Child ; while the adoration of Mithra, the Sun-God, lingered in the practice, yet preserved, of bowing toward the East. The orientation of churches has descended to us from the rites of Etruscan augury, and Etruscan influence is visible in the entire system of ecclesiastical ceremonialism. The

very title Pontifex Maximus is frankly pagan, having been that of the high dignitary who, during the time of the Cæsars, lived in an official residence close to the Palatine, the head of the College of Bridgemakers or Pontiffs. Love-feasts were substituted for heathen sacrifices, kalends and solstices celebrated under Christian patronage. The birth of Christ—which, whenever it occurred, did not take place in December—was kept at the Winter Solstice, while that of John the Baptist was made to coincide with the corresponding phenomenon in the summer. The deification of virtues, or divine attributes—which is of the very essence of paganism—was preserved, saints, as objects of worship, replacing the gods and goddesses of yore ; so that at this very day, to take a concrete example, St. Antony of Padua is regarded as specially helpful, not only in finding trinkets that have been mislaid, but in guiding his votaries in their operations upon the Bourse. “The popularity of Saint Antoine de Padoue in France,” said a French abbé at the table

d'hôte of an hotel not long ago in the writer's hearing, "is something quite extraordinary ; he is a great deal more popular, even, than *le bon Dieu* !" And just as, in pre-Christian days, an idol would be carried about in processions during a time of plague or famine, adorned with jewels and honoured with incense and music, so at this very day in Romish countries do we find the self-same practices in vogue—rival images of the Madonna paraded in seasons of public anxiety, Our Lady of This competing in popularity with Our Lady of That (as though Christ had had any number of mothers), and the Black Madonna of Oropa in Piedmont, an idol of enormous reputation, loaded with pearls and emeralds by the late King of Italy himself. The very wayside shrines one sees in country places all over the continent originated in the Roman *Compitales*, or deities who presided over cross-roads ; the use of incense was condemned even by Tertullian as a direct imitation of heathen worship ; and offerings by barren women to some favourite

saint with a view to procuring children were formerly made to Priapus. In short, examples might be furnished without limit. That the Pope's chair-of-state, red shoes, and peacock-feather fans are the direct descendants of similar institutions in pagan Rome, is a commonplace of history, while the practice of kissing his toe was ordained, for the gratification of Imperial vanity, by the estimable and virtuous Caligula. Well might Faustus the Manichean deny, even in his day, that Christians had really abandoned paganism.*

Thirdly, there would have been no Italianization of Christianity. Of course it is evident that whenever a religion is imported into a country and there takes root, there will always grow around it a certain amount of local colour. This is observable even within the pale of Romanism itself. The Romanism of Boston, for example, differs widely from the Romanism of Manila or any of the South American Republics ; while the Protestantism of, say, Scotland, has characteristics which

* Stanley, *passim*.

are wholly wanting in the Protestantism of Germany or of Sweden. But whereas Protestantism is based upon a book, Romanism is based very largely upon tradition, its claim being that the Church existed before the Bible; and this tradition is guarded, developed, explained, and acted on by a clique of Italian ecclesiastics at Rome, whose decisions are based on the astounding assumption that when Christ was seen of His disciples during the forty days after His resurrection and spoke to them "of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God," what He really did was to divulge the whole body of Romish doctrine as it exists to-day, the Immaculate Conception and Papal Infallibility included! It is the Curia which now claims to be His mouthpiece, determines the limits of orthodoxy, and calls for the unhesitating submission of every Catholic to its decisions. That is to say, no man of science, no Darwin, or Newton, or Faraday—of course we use these names as representative, simply, of scientific discoverers

and thinkers—is permitted to teach, or even to believe, any scientific fact, however palpable, which happens to be condemned by a few incompetent sciolists who know little more of physical science than a Chinese mandarin knows of Sir William Hamilton's philosophy. A biologist, a naturalist, a decipherer of cuneiform inscriptions, enjoys his right to hold and teach the discoveries he has made, on sufferance ; at the good will and pleasure of a small circle of Italian bigots, who, in addition to their natural incapacity to judge the matter under consideration from lack of the requisite training, are bound to respect the decisions of their predecessors in bygone centuries lest the Church should contradict itself. In theory, at any rate, progress in science the world over is at the mercy of a secret committee in Rome, whose verdict as to the admissibility or non-admissibility of a scientific fact depends upon whether such fact is or is not compatible with the traditional interpretation of statements found in certain unscientific and often

mutually contradictory books written between two and three thousand years ago by nobody exactly knows whom. The worthlessness of such decisions is proved by the fact that the predecessors of the present committee denied, in 1616, that the earth moved round the sun, and that Pope Benedict XIV., a pontiff of exceptional liberality and learning, was forced virtually to repeal their decree in 1757.

It does seem strange when one comes to think of it, too, that a religion which claims to be, and in a sense is, world-wide, should be governed at headquarters exclusively by Italians. Why this extraordinary monopoly? The Italians are in many respects a most estimable race—courteous, fair-minded, kindly, clever in various ways, brave, enthusiastic, public-spirited, and capable of real self-sacrifice. But that is no reason why a board of Italian priests should rule the religious world, and claim the intellectual and spiritual submission of scientific experts. There is a want of proportion, a want of

symmetry, about it somehow. Many of the leading scientific men of the present day are Italians, and some among these are Roman Catholics. But that a coterie of theologians, whose minds have never been strengthened by scientific training, but, on the contrary, are hampered by the prejudices and beliefs of bygone centuries—prejudices and beliefs long since exploded, yet crystallised into forms of so-called infallible dogma—that this clique of obscurantists should claim and exercise the power of determining whether a scientific fact is true or false, is suggestive of a comic opera. Nor is it anything less than farcical that an educated English gentleman should be invited to surrender his intellectual conscience to such a tribunal, whether in matters of science, or politics, or morality. That the members composing the tribunal are inadequate to adjudicate upon scientific questions has been amply proved. That they are blind guides in politics is shown by the attitude of the Vatican towards the electorate in monarchical Italy. And

that the less they talk about morals the better must be evident to everybody, Romanist and Protestant alike. The wickedness of the policy adopted by the Curia in the Dreyfus case outraged the conscience of Europe.

But had the Church been founded upon Mount Moriah the whole position would have been different. Jerusalem is, so to speak, neutral territory, and the Papacy there established would have been an International Papacy. There would have been no monopoly of this high office by any country in particular. The Ideal Church would be protected by all Christian Governments, and exercise no political power whatever of itself. Politically, in fact, it would be as independent and at the same time as powerless as the Republic of San Marino or the Principality of Monaco. Religiously it would be simply and solely the headquarters of the Christian Faith, a witness to Primitive Truth, powerless to enforce its decrees by any secular arm and strong only in spiritual and

moral force. Divergences of doctrine might spring up here and there, but no pagan corruptions born of impure ancestries, no adaptations of heathen rites and practices, could ever sully the simple and homogeneous standard of orthodoxy itself. Whatever heresies might creep in elsewhere, the standard of orthodoxy would remain untouched and uncontaminated, and Jerusalem would realise the ideal of the City set upon a Hill, the light from which would shine over the world in all its purity and strength. The Kings of the Earth might bring their honour and glory into it, but the Church of the First-born in Jerusalem would, from its very political isolation, be exempt from all the allurements of political intrigue. It would simply hold sway over the consciences of those who submitted themselves to it just as, by way of illustration, the Grand Lodge of Freemasonry holds sway over all Freemasons who are faithful to the high ideals of the Craft. And its creed, or standard of orthodoxy, would be as simple and undog-

matic as adherence to the recorded Sayings of Christ and the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles could make it.* Metaphysical and scholastic subtleties and the devious immoralities of ecclesiastical casuistry would be unknown, and the standard of orthodoxy would consist rather in the enforcement of purity, veracity, unselfishness, the return of good for evil, and self-sacrifice for the sake of others—things which hitherto seem to have been totally forgotten. The important points for those who desire salvation is that they should ‘think’ thus and thus about the Trinity, not that they should ‘do’ or ‘be.’ To confound the Persons and divide the Substance is a mortal sin; to doubt what the Church teaches, however great an outrage upon common sense, menaces an eternal penalty. Lie, slander, persecute, give rein to all depravity, and if you do it in the service of the Church you will be caressed,

* “Find me a Christian Church that has had no theologians to un-Christianise it, and I will become a convert.”—*A Roman Mystery*, by Mr. Richard Bagot.

as Father Bailly was by the Pope himself; or, if not in the service of the Church, well, the flesh is weak, and there is forgiveness ready for you in the confessional. But doubt the Infallibility of the Pope or the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin at your peril. That is a different matter altogether.

It may be said that there is no warrant for imagining that a Church centred in Jerusalem would have preserved so lofty a standard as we have sketched. Human nature is human nature the world over, and even the Free Churches of Christendom are not 'free' in the fullest sense of the word—not free from envies, jealousies, intrigues, and even the strangest forms of error. All that is true enough. And it is possible that even in the Ideal Church heresies might have crept in, just as they did in Apostolic and sub-Apostolic times. But from three great evils the Church, we hold, would have been very largely exempt. First, it would not have become contaminated by the saturation of such paganism as has eaten into the Church

of Rome. Secondly, the temptations to indulge in political intrigue would have been reduced to a minimum, and there would no more have been war-waging Popes and fighting Bishops than there are actually at the present day pigeon-shooting Archbishops of Canterbury or prize-fighting Presidents of the Wesleyan Conference. In the eye of such a Church the nations as nations would not exist ; its hierarchy would concern itself simply with the spiritual and moral welfare of the members and communities composing it of whatsoever nationality—Jew or Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free. And lastly, there would have been no great disruption, as in the eleventh and sixteenth centuries. Jerusalem would have remained indisputably and irrevocably the Apostolic Mother Church, and all shrines set up on the Bethels and Gerizims of Europe would have been branches of that Church, and not its foes and rivals.

In approaching the conclusion of this essay we approach what the Preacher calls the

conclusion of the whole matter. Hitherto the ground we have traversed has been purely speculative. Let us now deal with facts; and there are no facts surer in the world's history than that Rome is the headquarters of the greatest and most distinguished Church in Christendom and that Jerusalem is ecclesiastically insignificant—a hotbed of theological and topographical rancours, the scene of jealousies and rivalries and animosities which make its very name an irony. Two theories, therefore, and two only, are possible as regards the intentions of the Founder of Christianity. Either He purposed that Rome should be the metropolis of His Church, or He never envisaged the idea of its having any metropolis at all. The first of these theories must inevitably be held by all consistent Romanists. We have already noticed the tremendous assumption made by Father Clarke, S.J., in respect to the disclosures of the Forty Days; and if we once allow this very strange conceit, common sense compels us to admit that the Divine selection

of Rome as the centre of the new faith was included. Indeed, the mere fact of the Capital of the World having been converted into the Capital of the Church is in itself a proof, from the Roman standpoint, that such was the purpose of the Founder. It is true that we have no Scriptural record in support of this contention; it is even true that, supposing the Mystic Babylon of the Apocalypse to be no other than Pagan Rome—as, I believe, Romanists themselves believe—a very different view of its future was expressed by St. John the Theologian, for he predicted that after the fall of the great city it should become, not the headquarters of the saints, but the habitation of devils, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. How far this description applies to Alexander VI., John XII., Boniface VI., and Benedict IX., let historians decide. The fact remains that neither Christ nor any of His apostles indicated Rome as the future metropolis of Christianity.

Thus the second alternative is unavoidable.

meaning of
or anywhere else

And more—Jerusalem itself is ruled out. "The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, *nor yet in Jerusalem*, worship the Father." To interpret this as meaning that Gerizim and Jerusalem were to be boycotted, so to speak—that it would be unlawful or impossible to worship God in either of the places named—would be to reduce hermeneutics to a jest. The clear meaning is that no place was to be holier than any other place; that whether Jerusalem or Gerizim had been the authorised and orthodox seat of religion up till then, mattered nothing in view of the fact that, for the future, there was to be no spiritual metropolis whatever. The acceptable worship was thenceforth to be worship of the spirit, with nothing local about it.

What, then, was to be the outward aspect of the new Kingdom? For a kingdom without a capital seems almost a contradiction in terms. And a kingdom wants more than a capital; it presupposes a king, and a king presupposes ministers, ambassadors, and

officers of state—in short, the entire paraphernalia of administration. And this we have in all existing churches, especially in the Church of Rome, where the Pope is Viceroy, the Cardinals form his Cabinet, and the archbishops, bishops, priests and deacons are his subordinate officials. Nothing could be completer, nothing more consistent with the root-idea of a visible, governing, and autocratic Church. Yet we get no hint or inkling in the Gospels that the Founder of Christianity had anything like this complicated organism in His mind when He spoke about His Kingdom. On the contrary, He taught most explicitly that it was not an external affair at all. “The Kingdom of God is *within* you.” This at once excludes all idea of a governmental machine. Perhaps the analogy suggested by the word kingdom is misleading. Reign, or sovereignty, gives the truer meaning. It was the reign of God in the individual consciousness, not an external system of Imperial government, that Christ sought to bring about.

The misapprehension of this profound but

simple truth has produced more suffering to humanity than sin itself. Organized authority must have a code of dogmas as its base, and thus orthodoxy, or conformity to the official creed, usurps the place of holiness. Zeal for their own convictions, which men mistook for zeal for God, has given rise to wars bloodier than any wars of vulgar conquest, persecutions more diabolical than any known to heathendom. Men and women have been racked, broken, and burnt alive in defence of a metaphysical quibble; souls have been driven to despair for the sake of a letter in the Greek alphabet; prelates have banned and damned each other in the interest of some theory which, by its very nature, must be for ever beyond human knowledge and, true or false, is of not the slightest importance to any human soul.

*Inter finitimos vetus et antiqua simultas,
Immortale odium et nunquam sanabile vulnus
Ardet adhuc.
Inde furor vulgo, quod numina vicinorum
Odit uterque locus, cum solos credit habendos
Esse deos, quos ipse colit.*



And all these horrors have been perpetrated by religious men, who, as predicted by Christ, thought they were doing God service. There we have another fallacy: the impression that religion is the same as godliness. It very often has nothing whatever to do with it. Saul of Tarsus, Torquemada, the entire army of persecutors, were very religious men; but godly men they most certainly were not. And there are numbers of religious men to-day—honestly religious, even devout, without a shade of hypocrisy—whose private characters, so far from being godly, are detestable. Nor can we wonder at it. Whosoever will be saved—so we are officially informed—must think thus-and-thus of the Trinity. This is the Catholic Faith; which except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. St. Paul, in the 12th of Romans and elsewhere, gives a very different catalogue of requirements. There is something grimly humorous in the idea of Sir Isaac Newton, Dr. Channing, and Elizabeth

Fry having perished everlastingly because they did not "think of the Trinity" according to the formulas of the Athanasian Creed.

Then are we to have no creed at all? Why, yes; we must believe something, for otherwise we should be like ships without a compass. Only our Articles of Religion must be such as deal with character and conduct, not with the logomachies of the schools. Is it not strange that no Church since Apostolic times has ever adopted, as a test of membership, the teachings of its own Founder? "Imagine," says the Rev. John Watson, "a body of Christians who should take their stand on the sermon of Jesus, and conceive their creed on His lines. Imagine how it would read. *I believe in the Fatherhood of God; I believe in the words of Jesus; I believe in a clean heart; I believe in the service of love; I believe in the unworldly life; I believe in the Beatitudes; I promise to trust God and follow Christ, to forgive my enemies and seek after the righteousness of God.* Could any form of words be more elevated,

more persuasive, more alluring? Do they not thrill the heart and strengthen the conscience? Liberty of thought is allowed; liberty of sinning is alone denied. Who would refuse to sign this creed? They would come from the east and the west, the north and the south, to its call, and even they who would hesitate to bind themselves to a crusade so arduous would admire it and long to be worthy. Does anyone say that this is too ideal, too impractical, too Quixotic? For three too short years the Church of Christ had none else, and later it was by holy living, and not by any metaphysical subtleties, the Primitive Church lived, and suffered, and conquered."

And the only metropolis needed by or possible to such a religion as this would be the City of Mansoul.

The Ten Commandments

THE people who go about dropping hints that a Revision of the Book of Common Prayer will ere long come within the range of practical politics can scarcely be reckoned among the most judicious friends of the Church of England. We will not go so far as to call them its most insidious foes, for that would be discourteous; but it is difficult to imagine any undertaking more certain to result in damage and scandal to the Church. For to what end is Revision advocated? To arrive, we suppose, at the discovery of such verbal formularies as shall be acceptable to all the three great parties into which the Church may roughly be divided. It is, of course, just conceivable that there may exist

some great master of ambiguities, some expert juggler with the King's English, capable of accomplishing this prodigy. To hit upon an arrangement of words which should be fairly and naturally interpretable as inculcating at once Zwinglianism and the Real Presence, Baptismal Regeneration and the denial of Baptismal Regeneration, according to the belief of the user, seems certainly an arduous task, even if assigned to the genius of a rhetorician yet to be unearthed ; but imagination pales before the thought of, say, fifty partisans, representing the views of Lord Halifax, Canon Webb-Peploe, and the late Dr. A. W. Moberly, engaged in the attempt to express their several theological creeds in formulas that shall fit all three. For, unless history lies, ecclesiastical conclaves are not the most placid of assemblies. At the Council of Ephesus, the Bishop of Constantinople was stamped to death by his brother in Christ the Bishop of Alexandria, and the general proceedings, as reported by short-

hand writers, resembled a particularly murderous brawl, only on a larger scale, at some night-house in Naples or San Francisco. The Council of Chalcedon was a beargarden, the Bishops shouting each other down with the coarsest abuse and insults; on another occasion the representatives of the Church Militant were thrashed into signing their names to a blank document; while at the Council of Nicæa Bishop Nicolas broke Arius's jaw with his fist. Even Church Congresses, in our own days, get mildly excited now and then, to judge by the newspaper reports, which parenthesize such manifestations of disapproval as hoots, hisses, and hulloaings. In what manner, judging from these precedents, our supposititious Revisers of the Prayer Book would accentuate their differences, we forbear to speculate; we only wonder how many would survive to give us an account of the proceedings, and how much of the Prayer Book there would be left.

At the same time it must be admitted that

there are certain parts of the Book of Common Prayer, calling for revision, which do not come under faction-disagreements properly so considered; and it is to one of these that we now propose very diffidently to invite attention. We refer to the Ten Commandments; and particularly to the Ten Commandments as forming part of the Service of Holy Communion. This latter point may be dismissed in a few words. The Service of Holy Communion has reference to an event the historicity of which is beyond all cavil. That event is as certain, as unchallengeable, as the signing of Magna Charta by King John. Nor was there anything supernatural about it; the bare external facts being that on a certain evening thirteen persons sat round a supper-table in Jerusalem, and that certain things were said and done by them which have come down to us. It is impossible to say as much for the origin of the Ten Commandments, the alleged concomitants of which partake very strongly of the legendary, besides dating,

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according to the orthodox chronology, something like three thousand four hundred years ago. Nor is there the slightest obvious connection between the commemoration of Christ's death by Christians and the recitation of a Code of Precepts said to have been given in the desert of Sinai to a horde of semi-barbarous people 1491 B.C. There is a want of relevance about it, somehow. One would almost as soon expect to find a formal recapitulation of the Game Laws forming part of the Order for the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony.

But the main point we have in view goes further. We assert that the Ten Commandments, as a guide for the conduct of life, are inapplicable and inadequate to the circumstances of Christian people. The general view of the Code is, we know, different. Many persons describe it as a summary of the Whole Duty of Man, if properly interpreted; a provision for every spiritual requirement, a scheme of morals which if a man keep—only of course he never can—he

would need no other passport to heaven. It is this piece of special pleading, this most mistaken and superficial judgment, which we now propose to test, and, if possible, to disprove.

Before doing so, however, it may be as well to recapitulate the circumstances under which the Code was formulated in the first instance, so as to have everything fair and clear before us. According, then, to the account in Exodus, it happened on a certain day, in the desert, that God descended upon the summit of Mount Sinai (7346 ft. above sea-level) while Moses ascended to the same spot, the Israelites remaining at the base. Then God, having threatened to "break forth" upon the people if they "broke through" to gaze at Him, sent Moses down to speak to them ; though nothing is said as to what he was to say, nor are we told what he did say. But God Himself was the chief speaker ; for the account proceeds, "And God spake all these words, saying"—and then follow the Ten Commandments, delivered by God's own

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mouth (chap. xx. 22). Moses then retired into the thick darkness where God was, and God proceeded to give him an exceedingly long and most intricate code of laws and ordinances of a moral, social, and ceremonial nature—so long, and so intricate, that no human brain could have retained a hundredth part of it without supernatural assistance. When this was ended, Aaron, Nabab, Abihu, and seventy elders were introduced into the Divine presence, though afar off; and there they saw God standing on a blue pavement, and were entertained with meat and drink. Then Moses was summoned once more into the mysterious cloud, where God promised to give him some stone slabs, or tablets, on which He had written His Commandments; and for forty days he remained there, while God imparted to him further instructions of immense length and most bewildering complexity, descriptive of the Tabernacle that he was to construct—its measurements, its furniture, its trimmings, its ornaments, the bonnets that the sons of Aaron were to wear

for glory and beauty, the sacrifices that were to be offered, and a thousand other matters down to the minutest detail. How all these particularities and delineations were preserved in the memory of the listener we are not informed ; but apparently they were remembered somehow. At last God made an end of His instructions, and delivered to Moses “two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God” ; and then hurried him down, informing him that the Israelites had meantime been corrupting themselves with a molten calf, which they were even then engaged in worshipping. So Moses, after deprecating the Divine jealousy, descended the mountain, and, sure enough, found the people dancing naked (A.V.) round the calf in question ; which so incensed him that in an access of rage he dashed the tablets to the ground and broke them—the tablets “which were the work of God, and the writing on which was the writing of God” ; and then he burnt the idol in the fire, grinding it to powder and strewing the

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powder on the water, which he then made the people drink. Now this statement, it must be remarked in passing, requires some explanation which we are not able to give. The calf was of gold, and gold-dust, if cast into water, would immediately sink to the bottom, leaving the water as clear as before ; while to swallow gold-dust in any form would surely have very serious results. But the worst was yet to come. A great massacre was ordered, in which about three thousand of the naked dancers were put to the sword by their nearest relatives ; and Moses, thinking they had been sufficiently chastised, again interceded for the survivors. God, however, thought differently, and “plagued” the people because of the golden calf.

But it was now necessary that the Two Tables that Moses had destroyed should be replaced ; so God told Moses to hew two other tables like the first, adding that He would write upon these new tables the same words as on those which had been lost. So Moses did so, and appeared before God with the



two new tables in his hand ; whereupon God dictated to him a New or Second Decalogue, spoken of as “a Covenant,” the provisions of which were as follows :—

(1) Thou shalt worship no other god.

(2) Thou shalt make thee no molten gods.

(3) The Feast of Unleavened Bread shalt thou keep.

(4) Every firstling is mine.

(5) Thou shalt rest on the Seventh Day.

(6) The Feasts of Weeks, and Ingathering, shalt thou keep.

(7) All male children shall appear before me three times a year.

(8) Thou shalt not leave over the fat till next morning, or mix leaven with my sacrifices.

(9) Thou shalt bring the first fruits of the land into my house.

(10) Thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, *Write all these words ; for after the tenor of these*

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words have I made a Covenant with Israel. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the Covenant—the Ten Commandments.”

Now here we are confronted by a very serious difficulty. In the 1st verse of chapter xxxiv. God is made to say most distinctly that He Himself would write upon the substitute-tables the words that were on the original tables that Moses broke ; while in the 27th verse of the same chapter we are informed that, not God, but Moses, wrote at God's dictation, and that what he wrote was, not the First Decalogue, but the Second, a *précis* of which appears above. And what a difference there is between the two ! The one almost exclusively moral and religious ; the second, occupied with comparative trivialities about fat, and leaven, and how not to boil a kid. There is only one explanation, and that is a rationalistic one. Moses, finding the people so faithless, or so barbarous, as to have been unable to keep the two simplest and most fundamental commandments of the First Decalogue for six weeks, temporarily

abrogated the entire Code, substituting for it the more materialistic formalities which largely make up the Second. And that, perhaps, is what is hinted in the statement that while God wrote the first with His own finger, it was Moses who wrote the Second, though at the prompting of God. But this ignores the supernatural element altogether, and leaves Moses alone upon the stage. Of course it may be said that there is no definite assertion that it *was* the First Decalogue that was written on the original pair of tables; the text running (chapter xxiv., verse 12), “. . . . and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written”—no specific mention being made of the original Ten Commandments. But this would prove too much. It is impossible that any two stone slabs, of a size to be portable, could have contained the very lengthy instructions which run to just one hundred verses in our Bible (chaps. xxi.-xxiii.), or even a summary of them. What, then, are we to conclude? Did the sub-

stitute-tables contain the Second Decalogue only? It would certainly appear so, according to chap. xxxiv. 27, 28. The compiler of Chronicles and the writer to the Hebrews both speak of these tables as containing "the Covenant," which is the word applied to the Second Decalogue. And yet a belief that the Two Tables preserved in the Ark were inscribed with the First Decalogue, as read in our churches to-day, is an integral portion of the Christian faith.

But enough. Whatever the explanation of all these ambiguities and seeming contradictions may be, our business lies with the Decalogue given in the 20th chapter of Exodus, as forming part of the Liturgy of the Church of England; and we now propose to go through it point by point, in support of our contention that the continued use of it is a very great anachronism. We take, then, the *First Commandment*, which runs—in the Prayer Book version—as follows:

"I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods but me."



Now this is generally understood, and adopted, by Christian congregations as a statement of Monotheism. There is but one God, and I am He; to worship idols is therefore a heinous crime and sacrilege. Such is the Christian gloss. But it is based on a total misunderstanding of the text. The Jews were not monotheists, but henotheists; they believed in Jahveh not as the one and only God, but simply as the greatest and most powerful of gods, or Baalim. These Baalim were largely local, and Jahveh ranked as the Baal of Canaan after the Israelites had settled there. Even the proper names we read of support this fact, for besides such personal designations as Eli-Jah, Zedek-Jah, and Jerem-Jah, we find Jeru-Baal, Esh-Baal, and Meri-Baal. And as Baal meant simply 'lord,' it is not surprising that the people got confused, and sometimes worshipped a foreign Baal in mistake for their own. Monotheism, in fact, can scarcely be said to have taken firm root among them very long before the Exile; while it is certain that the monotheistic

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interpretations of the First Commandment did not occur to them at all. In fact, the Israelites had not arrived at so high a point of intellectual evolution as to be capable of conceiving all that is implied in the word God. They were not a metaphysical race even in their prime, and at the epoch when the Decalogue is supposed to have been presented to them they had barely emerged from barbarism. Such a concept as that of the Absolute, the Being of Beings, the self-existent Power that never began to be, was totally and utterly beyond them. Had it been otherwise, it would have been absurd to warn them against worshipping any rival deities. The Universal does not admit of competitors. The Infinite cannot enter the lists with finites. But the people had no knowledge of such abstractions; all they knew was that a certain powerful Deity called Jahveh had taken them under his protection, having given them an earnest of his good will towards them by delivering them from a galling captivity; and now, at

the outset of his relations to them, he announces the fact in set terms. Hear, O Israel ; I am Jahveh, *your* God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt ; and you are to worship me—me and me only—not Moloch, or Chemosh, or Ashtaroth, or any of the other Baalim that you will find worshipped in Canaan when you get there. You are bound to me by gratitude for what I have done for you already, and by what I am going to do for you in the future. I have constituted myself *your* God, your tribal deity and protector, and I intend to fight your battles for you against the native tribes of Palestine, each of whom is under the protection of its own local gods and goddesses.

Such, I submit, is the meaning of the First Commandment ; that was how the Israelites understood it, and their subsequent adventures in the subjugation of the Promised Land illustrate the correctness of this view. Now the God of Christian worship is not of Hebrew origin or of Hebrew nationality, but

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the Eternal Source of the Infinite Universe ; and the injunction to worship no *other* gods has therefore no applicability to educated people at the present day, except in a derived and figurative sense.

The *Second Commandment* falls, or seems to fall, into two distinct sections. The first clause is an emphatic prohibition (*a*) to *carve* imitations of any natural object whatever, and even (*b*) to *make*—whether by carving or any other process—the ‘likeness’ of such a thing. If we accept this clause by itself, all painters, sculptors, and embroiderers break the Second Commandment every day of their lives ; and we who frequent the Salon, the Royal Academy, the Uffizi, the Vatican, the Brera, and all the other great art-galleries of Europe, are guilty of connivance at their sin. But the decorations of the Tabernacle in the Desert and of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem are a sufficient proof that the Jews did not so interpret the command, which must then be taken as a whole—the second clause, forbidding the *worship* of such works of art,

being regarded as the real gist and kernel of the utterance. And for us, surely, such a prohibition is anachronistic. It is true that there are a few shallow enthusiasts to be met with who will tell you that Art is the only God they serve, and these may, by a stretch of language, be considered as infringing the Second Commandment ; but such persons do not form a conspicuous element of Anglican congregations, and to those who do—the ordinary Sunday church-goers—the announcement that they are forbidden to bow down to pictures and statues on pain of such an act being visited upon their great-great-grand-children appears just a little absurd.

Of the *Third Commandment* it is not necessary to say much, as it is not, and probably never will be, open to the charge of anachronism. The taking of God's name in vain may be understood (*a*) as the sin of profane swearing, and (*b*) as the habit of invoking the name of the Deity in support of assertions either false or frivolous. As far as I know, these are the only possible inter-

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pretations of the phrase, and the relevance of the Commandment at the present day is palpable enough.

The *Fourth Commandment* occupies a distinctive position in the Code, as it is the only one which pertains to ritual rather than to morals. It runs thus :

Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do ; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt do no manner of work, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, thy man-servant and thy maid-servant, thy cattle, and the stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day ; wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it.

Such is the law which people pray every Sunday that God will incline their hearts to keep. What, then, is the day to be observed? What are the sanctions given for the observance of it? And in what way is it to be kept?

Well, the day to be observed is the seventh day, or Saturday. Needless to remark,

therefore, that no church-people in England or any other country ever dream of keeping Saturday—as a day of rest or worship. That is the first point.

As regards the sanctions, there are two. The first is that given in the Book of Exodus and read in church—namely, that God began to create the universe on Sunday morning and concluded His labours on the following Friday evening; resting, after His week's work, on the Saturday. But no educated person at the present day believes that He did anything of the sort. We know that untold millenniums passed in those cosmic processes which gradually brought about the life-bearing epoch on our planet, and that there never were any geological or palæontological periods in the least answering to the six days of Genesis. That sanction, then, has no applicability to us. The second is that given in the Book of Deuteronomy—that the Lord brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, where he was a servant. How these two sanctions are to be reconciled

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we need not stop to inquire. We are not Israelites, we were never servants in Egypt, and consequently we were never delivered from the Egyptian taskmasters. Again the sanction is entirely irrelevant as regards ourselves.

The way in which the Jewish Sabbath was to be kept, and actually was kept, receives abundant illustration in the Pentateuch. A man who once picked up a few sticks on the Sabbath day was slaughtered by the horrible process of stoning; and this by express command of 'the Lord.' It was a breach of the Sabbath to walk more than a certain distance, to light a fire, to cook food, to knead dough, and, in short, to do any work whatever that was not absolutely necessary to life. Of course it would be unfair to lay stress on the absurdities of later Rabbinical refinements, which distinguished the untying of knots which could be untied with one hand from the untying of those which required two. For such vagaries Moses was not responsible. Let us confine

ourselves to such applications of the Law as were authorised by the Lawgiver himself; and it is enough to observe that, of these, nine-tenths are infringed with a perfectly clear conscience by the most pious Christians every Sunday of their lives. And now mark the two inconsistencies of which these estimable persons are guilty. In the first place, they imagine they are obeying a law (given to Jews) to keep one day in a certain fashion by keeping another day in a totally different fashion. It is as though there were a commandment that Mohammedans should eat nothing but beef on Mondays, and Christians attempted to keep it by eating nothing but mutton on Tuesdays. They profess to observe the Saturday law by keeping it on Sunday, while they do things on Sunday which were forbidden to be done on Saturday; fancying, confusedly enough, that they make up for their disobedience by keeping Sunday as a day of religious observance and churchgoing, and ignoring the fact that the Commandment never says anything

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about Tabernacle-going on Saturday at all. In the second place, it never occurs to them that if they bind themselves to obey a certain commandment they *ipso facto* lay themselves open to the punishment awarded to those who infringe its provisions in the very smallest detail. That punishment, as we know from Biblical examples, consisted in being smashed to death with stones; and everyone who professes to keep the Fourth Commandment, and yet so far breaks it as to allow his cook to roast a joint or his housemaid to light a fire—even, too, so far as to walk a couple of miles himself on Sunday afternoon—may thank the law of the land he lives in that religious inconsistency is not visited with so severe a penalty in these more enlightened days.

It may be desirable to point out, in this connection, that various institutions commonly supposed to be peculiar to the early Hebrews, and even to constitute a special covenant between them and Jehovah, were not confined to the Hebrews at all, but were

shared by the surrounding nations. Circumcision was one ; indeed, the Philistines appear to have been the only Oriental people among whom that rite was not practised. This fact accounts for the scornful expression 'an uncircumcised Philistine' met with every now and then ; never do we read of an uncircumcised Ammonite or Egyptian. In what way, therefore, so widespread a practice came to be regarded as an exclusive sign of the Chosen People, imposed on them and them only by the Lord Himself, is not very easy to determine. And what is true of circumcision is true also in a very large measure of the Sabbath. This again was by no means a purely Hebrew institution. It was known to the Assyrians and Babylonians, among whom every seventh day was a Sabbath, or, as they put it, a Day of Rest for the Heart. It was also known to the Egyptians, who regarded the seventh day as taboo, a *dies infaustus*, on which it was unlucky to undertake any work—much as Friday is regarded by superstitious people

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among ourselves. The Israelites adopted the Sabbath from the Egyptians, just as they adopted other religious or ritualistic ordinances—the ark, the periodical feasts, the oracles, the sacrifices, the prejudice against pork, the scapegoat, the immolation of the red heifer, and others too numerous to mention.

Such, then, appear to have been the principal characteristics and origin of the Jewish Sabbath, the sanctity of which the Church of England causes her members to pray that they may be divinely assisted to observe. They might just as well pray for divine assistance in keeping the Feast of Weeks, or ask God to preserve them from the temptation to seethe a kid in its mother's milk. As a matter of fact, they do not keep the Jewish Sabbath, or make any attempt to do so—beyond closing their shops and offices at one o'clock in order that their clerks may have a half-holiday in the country. But there is another Day which they do regard as holy, and to this it is now necessary to allude,

Beyond its periodical recurrence, once in every week, this Day has nothing whatever in common with the day referred to in the Fourth Commandment. The Jewish holy-day was the last day of the week; its Christian analogue is the first. The former, as we have seen, commemorated (1) the supposed rest of God after the fatigues of Creation, and (2) the deliverance of Israel from Egypt; the latter commemorates the Resurrection of Christ—an event which has no more to do with either of the other two than the accession of King Edward to the throne of his ancestors has to do with the discovery of America or the invention of the mariner's compass. In ordinary parlance the Day is called Sunday, a name which reflects precisely the same heathen origin as the names of other days in the week that keep alive the memory of Freya, Woden, and Thor. But in religious parlance it is known as 'the Lord's Day,' because it is the day on which, according to the Gospel story, the Lord's Resurrection took place. The observ-

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ance of the Sabbath was a matter of law, enforced by a terrific penalty ; for the observance of the Lord's Day there is no law whatever. It is a matter of pious custom only ; and its sanction is personal preference and spiritual or religious taste.

Now 'the people called Christians' may, for the purposes of our argument, be roughly divided into two classes : those who profess to keep this Day somehow, and those who make no profession of the sort. And the former class falls into two subdivisions—those to whom the religious observance of it is a solace and a delight, and those to whom it is a most irksome and disagreeable duty. These are the people who, conceiving themselves bound by some law, are for ever trying to evade it ; who are continually saying, *May* I do this? *Mayn't* I do that? Is it *wrong* to do the other? To which questionings the reply is simplicity itself ; for there is no law—it is purely a matter of taste. It is for the relief and encouragement of this subdivision of Sunday-keepers that a

benevolently disposed young Socialistic clergyman has come forward with a mouthful of arguments in favour of the almost complete secularization of the Day. He adopts for his pamphlet a pagan title—‘The Day of the Sun’; which suggests to his readers that he might have felt somewhat hampered in his polemic had he called it ‘The Day of the Lord.’ This gentleman appears to find a religious Sunday a sour and gloomy affair; he advocates operas, sports, merrymaking, social entertainments, and worldly pleasures in general; he contrasts what he calls ‘spontaneous worship’ with what he calls ‘enforced knee-drill’; and he chides the half-heartedness of his clerical brethren for offering us only ‘a *little* theatre-going.’ It will be news to most people, I fancy, that the clergy have made any such ‘offer’ as our author mentions. That, however, is a matter of detail. The point is that in his plea for a merrymaking and theatre-going Sunday he gives precisely the assistance longed for by the ‘Mayn’t I do this?’ people, who, with

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an ordained minister of the Gospel for their sponsor, will easily and confidently pass into the ranks of those who neither keep the day at all nor make any profession of doing so.

We are left, therefore, with two sharply contrasted classes ; those who, finding religion the most intolerable bore of life, devote their Sundays to picnics, bridge, carpet-dances, private theatricals, and dinner-parties, and those who welcome Sunday as a blessed respite from worldly distractions, and value beyond everything else the opportunity of devoting one day out of the week's hurly-burly to close and undisturbed communion with God. The former are generally found among the smart set, stage-players, and those whom Mr. Cotsford Dick wittily calls the Higher Hooligans. The latter exist in considerable numbers in all ranks of society, but are, otherwise, not easily classifiable. Where, then, shall we find an illustration of these perversely religious folk, drawn from actual life? Let us go back some centuries. We see two men walking

along a country road on the first Sunday evening of all, engaged in deep and enthralling converse. Anon they are joined by a mysterious and benign stranger, who asks the reason of their preoccupation, and gives them wonderful and unlooked-for comfort. As they approach their destination, the stranger makes as though he would have gone further ; but so great is the fascination of his presence that they cannot bear to be parted from him. "Abide with us," they plead, "for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." So he goes in to sup with them, and in the act of blessing the repast he vanishes. "It is the Lord!" they breathe as the truth bursts upon them. "Did not our hearts burn within us as He talked?" Then they return to the city, where they tell the great news to their brethren, and again the stranger—this time no longer such—appears in their midst, and breathes a magic "Peace" over their now happy and rejoicing souls.

Happy? Rejoicing? Nay; sour and

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puritanical, according to our latest teacher. A merry game of bridge, or a comic opera, would have been better for them ; but unluckily no such recreations were available in the unenlightened city where they dwelt. Well, then, let us come down to more modern times. There was a man not so very long ago who seems to have been equally deluded as to where true happiness on Sunday was to be found. Listen to his words.

 Welcome, sweet Day of Rest,
 Which saw the Lord arise ;
Welcome to this reviving breast,
 And these rejoicing eyes.

 The King Himself draws near,
 And feasts His saints to-day ;
Here we may sit, and see Him here,
 And love, and praise, and pray.

 One day amidst the place
 Where my dear God hath been,
Is sweeter than ten thousand days
 Of pleasurable sin.

 My willing soul would stay
 In such a frame as this,
And sit and sing herself away
 To everlasting bliss.

There's gloom for you! There's bigotry! There's puritanical sourness! How sad for simple Dr. Watts that he did not live rather nearer to our own times, when some gay young clergyman might have come along and said to the benighted divine,—“My poor old fellow, all this is a survival of puritanism. Come, let *me* show you how to spend a cheerful Sunday. Suppose we go to the Empire, or the Oxford, and see Miss Tottie Jumps in her celebrated new *pas seul*? Or perhaps you would prefer a game of cards? A performance by the Stage Society? A supper at Prince's, where you'll see some of the smartest women in London?” Good gay young clergyman! It is as though some pert schoolboy had disturbed the celestial computations of an even more eminent Isaac with an invitation to leave his dreary old sums and star-gazings, and join in a game of pitch-and-toss in some convenient gutter.

The *Fifth Commandment* tells us to honour our fathers and our mothers, in order that our days may be long in the land which the

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Lord our God has given us. Now in dealing with this injunction, two considerations present themselves. The first is, it must be confessed, not of very vital consequence. But there is something rather grotesque in the spectacle of aged men and women praying that they may be divinely assisted to honour parents who have probably been dead for half a century ; and the objection applies, of course, to orphans of any age. The second consideration is more serious. The Jews were commanded to honour their parents with a view to enjoying longevity when they got to Palestine. It is difficult to see any natural connection between filial piety and long life—whether the length of days held out as an inducement to the special virtue in question be individual or national. The Jews, as a nation, had no particular reputation one way or another. We are not told, in the Old Testament, that they were eminent for filial piety or infamous for the lack of it. It is true that the typical unfilial son of Jewish history—Absalom—came to an un-

timely end, and that through impiety towards his father ; but no attention is invited to the fact, no moral is drawn from it. Nor, if we take the promised longevity as national, are we able to discover any connection between filial piety among the Jews and the number of centuries they lived in Palestine. Certain however is it that what brought about their ruin as a nation under Zedekiah were political fatuity, social degeneracy, and religious apostacy ; want of filial piety had nothing whatever to do with it. If, then, it is difficult to see how the alleged connection between the commandment and the promise attached to it had any application to the Jews, it is still more difficult in our own case. Filial piety does not, directly or indirectly, lead to longevity either in nations or individuals. The only apparent exception is China, where filial piety is the greatest of all virtues and its opposite the most flagrant of all sins. But what English churchmen have to do with such a collocation of ideas I have never been able to find out. Is there any man, woman,

or child, in any given church, who is seriously desirous of honouring his or her parents in order that he may live to be a hundred, or the British race continue to occupy Great Britain and Ireland in perpetuity? Of course not. Then what is the meaning of the prayer?

The *Sixth Commandment*, "Thou shalt do no murder," is chiefly interesting from the fact that the man who promulgated it was himself a murderer. In fact, it was owing to his assassination of an Egyptian taskmaster that he had been forced to flee from Egypt in the first instance. It may be, of course, that he regretted the hasty deed, and was now a penitent man. It is equally possible that he had intended it as a symbolical act, considering at the same time that the bully had got no more than he deserved. If this was so, it is clear that the general law against murder was not insusceptible of exceptions in the mind of the lawgiver. Indeed as we read on we find that many other exceptions crop up in the course of the

history. It was evidently not only allowable, but praiseworthy, to murder an unfortunate person for picking up sticks on the seventh day. To slaughter the wives and babies of one's enemies, in addition to slaughtering the enemies themselves, was a sacred duty, and we read of one king who, in spite of his due performance of this pious act, incurred instant sentence of deposition because he did not go further still, and massacre the live-stock too. For murdering a fugitive and defenceless foe who had thrown himself upon the protection of her hospitality, a woman of the name of Jael became a national heroine; songs in her praise flew from mouth to mouth among the people, and an honorific epithet was awarded her which is now the special prerogative of the Virgin Mary. While Elijah thought it no infraction of the Sixth Commandment to massacre four hundred and fifty priests of a rival persuasion of whom he had just got the better in a public theological controversy. So we see that the prohibition to do murder is by no

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means to be taken literally ; it admits of very important qualifications ; clearly, to steer our course by such oracles of God as speak to us from the pages of the Pentateuch, of Judges, of Samuel, and of Kings, we shall find ourselves at perfect liberty to murder not only our oppressors, but the near relatives of any men with whom we may be at war, and all our theological opponents. The Church of Rome, as we know, has been singularly apt in availing itself of this last privilege. So that seriously, when we consider how very loosely the commandment sat on the consciences of its exponents, and the very liberal construction it received in practice, the question arises whether it is worth while reading it every Sunday to people whose religion teaches them to love their enemies and not even to hate their friends. Murderers are not found in any considerable proportion in Anglican congregations, and persons who are murderously inclined are more likely to be deterred by the prospect of being hanged at eight o'clock in

the morning than by the most impressive intoning, once a week, of so utterly discredited an injunction.

The *Seventh Commandment*, as read in English to English congregations, has one meaning and one meaning only. It forbids sexual commerce between any two persons either of whom is married to somebody else. Or, more briefly, it forbids a breach of the marriage vow. Its object is to protect the sanctity of the family and the rights of husbands and wives towards each other.

And now see the liberties that have been taken with it by moralists and theologians. It covers, we are told, all sexual irregularity of whatever type. Whoever indulges in any form of impurity breaks the Seventh Commandment. It even condemns desire; for does not Christ Himself say that a man who even looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart?

The naïveté of this special pleading is nothing less than astounding. The quotation

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from Christ's words is given correctly, it is true; but what do they mean? Are they not the simple expression of a most obvious truth, namely, that to desire a thing ardently is to perform that thing mentally? Christ never said that to be tempted was the same as to yield to the temptation; and He certainly never said, or even implied, that to desire a woman was as wicked as to possess her carnally. That would be a most monstrous doctrine. It would, by parity of reasoning, make a young man, tempted to rob his employer's till, as great a criminal as though he had actually done so; it would lay an aggrieved man, hot to give his injurer an unchristian thrashing, open to the same rebuke as though he had carried out his impulse; in a word, seeing that no person exists who has not at some time been tempted to commit some act of injustice, dishonesty, spitefulness, or immorality of one sort or another, it would degrade millions of decent people to the level of convicted felons. To commit adultery, forgery, murder, in one's

heart, is no doubt a sin ; but surely to put the sinful impulse into practice is a sin still greater, unless we adopt the dictum of a discredited moralist of recent times that the best way of getting rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Though there is some truth in that also.

It is clear, then, that the Seventh Commandment does not forbid impurity as such ; and, this being the case, there is no injunction in the Decalogue against it. The Seventh Commandment ignores, and thereby leaves uncondemned, fornication, prostitution, seduction, and all those forms of sexual abnormality which exist everywhere and always, but of which we need not now speak particularly. Yet these irregularities were as well known among the Israelites as among every other nation before and since ; while the lives of David, Solomon, and other typical Hebrews of repute afford a curious comment upon the value attached to the Seventh Commandment in its most restricted sense by the nation generally.

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To show the utter absurdity of the opposite view—viz., that the mention of one very particular form of sexual wrongdoing implies and includes every other form—one has only to change the name of the thing forbidden ; to suppose, for argument's sake, that it was something else. Let us, for example, suppose that there was a commandment which ran, "Thou shalt wear no boots." Now let us apply to this the reasoning of our moralists and theologians. Boots are a part of clothing ; clearly, then, if it is wrong to wear boots, it is wrong to wear any clothes at all. Off, therefore, with our coats, hats, shirts, trousers, socks, and underwear ; whoever shall venture to go about with so much as a rag upon him breaks the commandment "Thou shalt wear no boots." That licentiousness is a sin I am not attempting to deny ; what I do deny is that it is forbidden by the Seventh Commandment. To maintain the current view is to maintain that the less contains the greater, and that the part is larger than the whole. And the inference

is plain: the Decalogue does not come up to the requirements of our moral standard at the present day.

The *Eighth Commandment*, forbidding theft, we may pass over. It embodies one of the universal principles of ethics.

The *Ninth Commandment* is open to precisely the same criticism as the Seventh. Here we have a condemnation of one special and very restricted form of lying; the lying that shall injure another man unjustly; the slanderous lie, in short. But of lying, as such, there is no condemnation whatever, as there is of theft and murder. This is a very remarkable fact. Was lying, then, not considered a sin by the Hebrew lawgiver? We know that truthfulness does not hold so high a place in the ethics of Southern and Eastern nations as it does with us. To doubt the word of an English gentleman is to insult him very grievously; but few Easterns would feel their honour hurt, however candidly suspicion of their veracity were expressed. To say that one has not

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done a certain thing when one has done it, to assert that it is half-past eleven when it is really a quarter to one, to assure a tedious acquaintance that it is a headache or a previous engagement that prevents your dining *tête-à-tête* with him when all the while you are both well and disengaged—such lies as these may hurt nobody; and yet no Englishman of fine sensitiveness or delicate self-respect would stoop to utter them, while pious people would shrink from them as deadly sin. The Hebrews, on the other hand, had fewer scruples, and, as we see in the ‘Corban’ quibble, condemned so scathingly by Christ, were past masters in the art of equivocation. Nay, more: we find them representing God Himself as employing a lying spirit to mislead a king to his ruin, as first deceiving a prophet and then destroying him for being deceived, and as giving the Israelites bad statutes and judgments whereby they should not live. Now a people capable of believing in and worshipping a Deity so basely untruthful as this

can scarcely be expected to hold verbal honour in very high esteem; and whether this low moral standard was the result of there being no law against lying in the Decalogue, or whether the omission of such a law was the reflection of the national characteristics, the fact remains that a Code which contains no condemnation of falsehood, as such, is singularly incomplete. It might of course be urged that, as lying is regarded as disgraceful among English people, there is the less need for its periodical prohibition in the ears of English churchgoers; but, contradictory as it may appear, the reprobation in which a vice is held affords no guarantee for its non-existence, and lying is no exception to the rule. There are systematic liars to be found everywhere, in England as in other countries, and if, as is threatened, "all liars" are reserved for a singularly unpleasant experience in another world, it seems a very serious oversight on the part of the compilers of our Liturgy not to have warned them against the hot

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sulphur-baths which await them after death. We may, however, suggest that the Ninth Commandment, as it stands, might very appropriately be emblazoned on the walls of our Courts of Justice, in full view of the witness-box.

The *Tenth Commandment* applies to everybody everywhere and in every age; and some people find it an almost impossible one to keep. Which is the prime justification of all laws.

Now it may be objected, with some show of reason, that the above remarks do not adequately deal with the universal problems which underlie the Decalogue, the fundamental facts of human experience and social exigences on which that and every other moral and religious code is based. To go to the root of the First and Second Commandments, it may be urged, it is necessary to treat the instinct of worship from a broadly scientific standpoint; to trace the evolution of fetichism, totemism, animism, ghost and ancestor worship, and all such

primitive exhibitions of the religious instinct, through nature worship in its various forms up to its highest development in pure Monotheism; and to lay stress on the very important fact that idolatry, so far from being a sin in itself, is a step upward in intellectual progress—a sin only when a higher stage has been reached and then receded from; in which case it may be properly denounced as apostacy. And our treatment of the Sixth Commandment may be condemned as superficial on the ground that we have ignored such root-ideas as religious human sacrifice on the one hand, and the Buddhist prohibition to take the life of even the meanest and most noxious insect, on the other. Again, it may be said that no criticism of the Seventh Commandment can be satisfactory which does not take into account the marriage customs of the most primitive communities, the different usages of civilised nations in all ages with regard to consanguinity, and—no unimportant point—what it is that constitutes true marriage.

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And truly it appears a little audacious, in view of actual facts, to use such a formula as "whom God hath joined together" in respect to such thoughtless and immoral couplings as are witnessed every day, whether in what is called high life or in the slum life of factory towns; when two human beings, impelled either by the most cynically worldly motives, or else in a fit of semi-drunken impulse, go through a form of words which binds them irrevocably together until one of them shall die. That such connections are the curse and ruin of both parties is a notorious fact; and to make God responsible for them—to affirm that it is He who has deliberately joined two ridiculous and mutually antagonistic persons to each other for as long as they both shall live—is a piece of impudent blasphemy. These and similar criticisms may be levelled at our treatment of the Decalogue, but they are not really to the point. To take so wide, so anthropological a view of the Ten Commandments does not come within our scope; to

include it would involve the making of a very large book indeed. Our object has been a far more modest one ; to submit to the reader what we consider valid grounds for the omission of the Ten Commandments from the Communion Service when the time for Prayer Book revision is ripe. It stands to reason that a Code given thousands of years ago to a barbarous nation, a Code which condemns image-worship, but has no word of reprobation for drunkenness, lying, or impurity as such, is inadequate and unsuitable to the moral requirements of a civilised English community at the present day. And its place should be taken by the Eight Beatitudes, supplemented by the Two Commandments which received the sanction of Christ, and the Golden Rule. All the rest, as Hillel said, is but commentary.

Karma and Reincarnation

THE system called Theosophy, or Divine Wisdom, claims to embody that aggregate of Actual Reality, of Eternal and Objective Fact, which underlies all the great philosophical religions; which shines through them, however clearly or however dimly—taking form and colour from their temporary and local conditions. This is a claim which cannot and should not be overlooked; from the very immensity of it, one is bound to give it a hearing. No insignificance on the part of its adherents, no imposture which may be alleged against its hierophants, should be held to justify the contempt which refuses to investigate; a key is offered us whereby to unlock the innermost secrets

of the physical and moral universe, and we are morally bound, as intellectual men and women, to see whether it will open the door of the mysterious partition or not.

The question therefore is this. Not—are we to believe in the existence of certain extraordinary beings in Thibet called Mahatmas, or Great Souls: not—are we to fall down and worship a Russian adventuress who, however marvellous her powers and unique her personality, was a detected and self-acknowledged trickster: but,—are there no dogmas in our own particular form of faith which require fuller explanation and a clearer light than the orthodox theologian can give us? Are there no mysteries, no contradictions, in the government of the universe, morally considered, that trouble us? Are there no teachings, familiar to us from our childhood, that we feel bound to accept and that nevertheless we do not really understand? For, to a thoughtful mind, a dogma appears to be no more than a crude attempt to convey, in utterly inadequate

language, a fact which belongs to a higher plane of being altogether; an attempt as hopeless as it would be to explain the Differential Calculus in a language in which one could only count as far as five, or to give an Andaman islander a clear idea of Parliamentary procedure in the House of Commons. Well, then, to all such doubts and perplexities the Theosophist offers us a key; and the question is, Are we to pass it by with a shrug, or to try, at any rate, whether it will fit the lock?

Now Theosophy, as dealing with unseen planes of being, is of necessity 'occult'; that is, it shows—or professes to show—what lies on the other side of the veil. And, as it teaches an occult religion, so it teaches an occult chemistry, an occult astronomy, an occult anthropology. It tells us of chains of worlds in the Solar System of which the Astronomer-Royal knows nothing. It tells us of wonderful forgotten races of men, great nations and powerful polities, that have appeared and passed away, undreamt of by

palæontologists. It tells us of strange beings, as much alive if not quite so intelligent as ourselves, that inhabit the hardest rock and the densest metal—moving to and fro in solid matter as easily as we move through the atmosphere. It tells us of the constituent bodies or shells of men, each one sloughed off as the man passes from the Physical plane to the Astral, from the Astral to the Mental, from the Mental to the Bûddhic, and so on. It tells us of the quasi-solid forms assumed by individual thoughts, passions, and desires, which, as embodied and semi-conscious entities, float hither and thither among the masses of humanity and give rise to corresponding thoughts, passions, and desires in the brains of others who are absolutely unconscious of their origin. It tells us that the powers called magical, supernatural, miraculous, are inherent and latent in every human being, and only require proper training to be developed and put to use. These and many other strange and wonderful things it tells us, things as interesting to the scientific

materialist as to the narrowest partisan of Christian orthodoxy, to the historian and anthropologist as to the psychologist and metaphysician; and a system which does that, I hold, is a system which, if only as a matter of intellectual curiosity, deserves recognition and inquiry.

But how are we to know that all this is true?—is the natural question that arises. To which there are two answers. In the first place, why may it not be true? No one, surely, will be found to affirm that we perceive everything that exists around us. Dogs and horses, for instance, undoubtedly see things which we do not. There are vibrations of light and vibrations of sound which are absolutely imperceptible to our faculties of sight and hearing. Are phenomena to be limited by the limitations of our five senses? Is there nothing in the universe but what we can see, or hear, or touch, or taste, or smell? Who would have believed a few years ago that it was possible to see through solids? Yet the Röntgen

rays have actually proved that, and Theosophists tell us that what may be provisionally called the Röntgen sight will be the next faculty to be developed in the human race—nay, it exists already in one instance known to hospital practitioners. Telepathy, clairvoyance, and the second sight are evidence of a latent power to receive impressions from a distance through agencies which are as yet a mystery to psychologist and physiologist alike ; many of the phenomena loosely called ‘spiritualistic’ are not only undeniable, but inexplicable by any laws of cause and effect known to the orthodoxy of science ; while there are solid grounds for accepting, if as a working hypothesis only, the possible existence of Four Dimensional space. So far, therefore, we hold that there is no reason for denying that the assertions of Theosophy above referred to *may* be true ; at any rate, they do not involve a contradiction in terms, and are, in consequence, not mathematically impossible. In the second place, the Theosophist would make, and quite justifiably, the

same reply as any scientific man would make if any statement of his were questioned. The astronomer tells us, for instance, that the sun is, roughly, ninety-one millions of miles from the earth. An ignorant man disputes this. It looks to me, says he, about forty-five or fifty ; how am I to know that your account is true?—Why, replies the astronomer, by going through the same education that I have. Study mathematics, learn how to measure space, practise looking through a telescope, place yourself under a qualified instructor, in short, undergo an apprenticeship to astronomy, with all that that involves, then make your calculations and you will find that I am right. So the Theosophist. Undergo the proper training, he tells us, learn how to develop the latent powers of your body, cultivate the inner vision that we call astral, subject yourself to the influences that make man independent of his physical encumbrances—become initiated, in a word—and you will find that what we tell you we have seen is true, because you will then be able to see

it and test it for yourself. To which there is no rejoinder.

And now it will be of interest to inquire about the attitude of Theosophy towards Christianity. Well, it explains everything, and explains away a good deal. The doctrine of the Trinity, including that of the Logos, receives its full support ; with this difference, however, that, while teaching the actuality of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the Theosophist styles these the Three Logoi, emanations, only, of the 'High God' who is for ever inconceivable and indefinable. There are many persons, beyond question, who are sorely perplexed by the doctrine of the Trinity ; who can only picture it to themselves as a sort of august Family,—who are wholly unable to imagine how the Father and the Son can be identical, and who find the relation of the Holy Ghost to the other Two beyond their powers of realization altogether. Let such persons attend a Theosophical lecture on the subject ; they will then see the whole mystery illustrated with a piece of chalk

upon a black-board, just like any mathematical proposition—the descent of the Second Logos, the creation by Him of material forms, and the outpouring of His life through successive chains of worlds and realms of being, all included. Or are they curious to learn more details of the conditions of life in Heaven and Hell, Paradise and Purgatory? Let them attend a lecture on the Astral and Mental Planes; they will then be able to follow the fortunes of the dead and their experiences beyond the veil, and it will be explained to them at every step,—*This* is what the Roman Church calls ‘Purgatory’; that lower and more hopeless condition is what the New Testament calls ‘Hell’; the higher regions of the Astral Plane are the ‘Paradise’ where the Penitent Thief found himself with Christ, and this is the stage next before entering on the Mental Plane, or Devachan—the Christian ‘Heaven.’ And thus the whole affair is made as clear as personal testimony and scientific exactitude can make it. These are the *rudiments* of Esoteric Christianity.

And traces of this Esotericism are to be found in the New Testament itself, we are assured, if only we were not so blinded by materialism and traditional theories as to be unable to read between the lines. Christ, we are continually reminded, was for ever drawing a distinction between the popular or exoteric teaching He gave the multitudes, and the mystical or esoteric doctrines He reserved for a chosen few. "To you it is given to know the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to others in parables." "Without a parable spake He not unto them; and when they were alone He expounded all things to His disciples." It is noteworthy that we have only the parables, not the expositions. "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." And after the Resurrection He remained with them forty days, "speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." Not a word of these secret communications has been preserved to us by the Evangelists. But we do find sayings of an abstruse and

enigmatical nature, ascribed to Christ, in other writings. The *Logia* discovered some years ago are an instance. "Raise the stone, and thou shalt find me; cleave the wood, and there am I." Is there no occult meaning underlying that? "I am come to destroy the works of the woman—that is, of concupiscence, whose works are generation and death." This is quoted in the *Stromata* of Clement of Alexandria. "Salome having asked how long men should live, He answered, 'As long as you women continue to bear children.'" The meaning here, of course, is that life is an evil; abolish procreation, and the evil disappears. And once again: "The Kingdom of God can only come when two shall be as one, and the man as the woman."—"When will Christ's Kingdom be realised?" "When ye shall trample on the garment of shame, when the two shall be one and the male as the female, neither male nor female."—"Let not him that seeketh cease from his search till he find, and when he finds he will wonder; wondering he shall

reach the Kingdom, and when he reaches the Kingdom he shall have rest." But such dicta, though enigmatic, are not necessarily occult in the technical sense of the word. Let us turn to that extraordinary book, *Pistis Sophia*, a work held in high honour by Theosophists, and an overflowing treasury of mystic revelation ascribed to Christ. It has just been noted that the Evangelists do not give us the faintest hint of what Christ said in secret to His disciples during the forty days which followed His resurrection. The *Pistis Sophia* gives, or professes to give, His *ipsissima verba*; only the period of their delivery was not forty days, but eleven years. It appears that, one morning, at the ninth hour, He suddenly became present to them, only in such a blaze of glory that they were nearly blinded; but He told them not to be afraid, and then—but we will transcribe the passage.

Then Jesus drew to Himself the glory of His light; and when this was done, all the disciples took courage and came to Jesus, and cast themselves together at His

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feet and worshipped Him, rejoicing with great joy. They said unto Him, "Master, whither didst thou go? or on what ministry wentest thou? or wherefore are all these confusions and shakings that have taken place?"

Then Jesus, the Compassionate, said to them, "Rejoice and be glad from this hour, for I have gone to the regions whence I came forth. From this day forward, therefore, I will speak with you freely, from the beginning of the truth to the completion thereof; and I will speak to you face to face without parable. From this hour will I hide nothing from you of the things which pertain to the heights, and of those of the region of truth; for authority hath been given me by the Ineffable and by the First Mystery of All Mysteries to speak to you, from the beginning to the end, from the interiors to the exteriors and from the exteriors to the interiors. Hearken, therefore, that I may tell you all things.

"It came to pass, as I was sitting a little removed from you upon the Mount of Olives, meditating on the duties of the ministry for which I was sent, which they said was completed, and how the Last Mystery had not yet sent me my vesture—it is the Four-and-twentieth Mystery from the interiors to the exteriors, of those which are in the second space of the First Mystery in the orders of that space—it came to pass, therefore, when I understood that the duty of the ministry for which I came was fulfilled, and that that Mystery had not yet sent me my vesture, which I had placed in it until its time should be fulfilled—I was meditating on this upon the Mount of Olives, a little removed from you

—it came to pass, when the sun rose in its place of rising, that then through the First Mystery, which was from the beginning, on account of which the universe hath been created, from which also now I am come, now and not formerly before they had crucified me ; it came to pass, by order of that Mystery, that this vesture of light was sent me, which He had given me from the beginning, and which I had placed in the Last Mystery, which is the Four-and-twentieth Mystery, from the interior of those which are in the orders of the second space of the First Mystery. This is the vesture, then, which I had left in the Last Mystery, until the time should be fulfilled when I should take it again, and should begin to speak to the human race, and reveal to them all things from the beginning of the truth to its completion, and speak to them from the interiors of the interiors to the exteriors of the exteriors, and from the exteriors of the exteriors to the interiors of the interiors. Rejoice, therefore, and be glad and rejoice more than greatly, for it is to you that it hath been given that I first speak from the beginning of the truth to its completion. For this cause have I chosen you from the beginning through the First Mystery.”

He then goes on to inform them that it was not Gabriel who announced His impending birth to Mary, but Himself, and that He assumed the disguise of Gabriel in order that the Rulers of the Æons might not

recognise Him. In point of lucidity and conciseness, this Preamble certainly leaves something to be desired; the effect of the involved, rambling, disconnected and wholly unparsable sentences is nothing less than bewildering. But we come to something more concrete further on.

Thomas said: "What shall be the punishment of a man that blasphemeth persistently?"

Jesus said: "When his time is accomplished by the spheres, the receivers of Ialdabaôth come to bind him by the tongue to a great horse-faced demon, and travel with him through the world for three days, and punish him. Then he is brought into the region of ice and snow, to be punished there for eleven years. Then he is carried below into chaos unto Ialdabaôth and his nine-and-forty demons, that each of his demons may chastise him for another eleven years. Then he is carried into the outer darkness, until the day when the great dragon-faced ruler, who encircleth the darkness, shall be judged. And that soul becometh hard frozen; it perisheth and is dissolved."

But what we want, after all, is a case in which Christ explained the occult meaning of one of His apparently simple sayings; and here is an example. On one occasion He

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told the people that if a man did not hate, or leave, his father and mother for His sake he was not worthy to be His disciple. So great an outrage on natural affection could not have been intended. Nor was it. No reference was made to one's human parents, but to the Rulers of the Fate of the Æons; who were to be abandoned and repudiated, in order that men might all become children of the First Everlasting Mystery. Another instance is furnished by the parable of the woman who hid the leaven in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened. Why a woman? And why three measures? Well, the woman is no other than the Divine Sophia, or Wisdom; and the three measures denote the tripartite nature of man. One more must suffice. "Agree with thine adversary quickly . . . lest the judge deliver thee to the officer and thou be cast into prison; verily I say unto thee, thou shalt not come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." The prison here is said to signify the prison of the flesh—*i.e.*, a succes-



sion of reincarnations ; in which we shall be entangled and bound up until all our debts to holiness are paid, if we die without having made our peace with right and truth.

So much, then, for the words of Christ. We now come to the Apostle Paul. He was, we are told, a very great Initiate, who had visions and revelations, and on one occasion actually left his physical body and was caught up into the Third Heaven—probably the Devachan. His epistles abound with allusions to the hidden or esoteric side of Christianity. “We speak the wisdom of God in a Mystery ; even *the hidden wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.” Here the reference is to far deeper things than the plain Gospel message delivered to the world at large. “We speak wisdom among them that are perfect”—*i.e.*, Initiates. “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal.”—“Ye were not able to bear it, neither yet are ye able.” But, “as a wise *Master-Builder* I have laid the foundation”—and this, we are told, is

a technical name in the Mysteries.\* “Let a man so account of us as of . . . stewards of the Mysteries of God.” — “By revelation He made known to me the Mystery . . . whereby when ye read ye may understand my knowledge in the Mystery of Christ.” — “The fellowship of the Mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.” — “The Mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to His saints.” — “O Timothy, keep *that which is committed to thy trust*; avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of the *γνῶσις* falsely so-called.” For it was the *true γνῶσις* of which St. Paul was a steward and an initiate.

It may be convenient to remark at this point that much of Theosophist teaching is distinctly Gnostic in character. From the orthodox point of view, Gnosticism was a dangerous heresy, to be crushed at all

\* It is interesting to note, in this connection, that the word translated ‘carpenter’ with reference to Christ’s trade, would be more aptly rendered ‘master-builder.’

hazards ; the Theosophist, on the other hand, tells us that Gnosticism embodied the inner truth and kernel of the Faith, that it enshrined, in fact, the very Mystery which St. Paul referred to in the above passages, but that it was smothered over and eventually lost through the growing materialism of the Church.

But there is more to come. The Early Fathers are also requisitioned as witnesses to the existence of a Mystery behind the Gospel. Clement of Alexandria, Jerome, Tertullian, Origen, Polycarp, Ignatius, testify in their writings to their knowledge of, if not their initiation into, these Divine secrets. The *Stromata*, already spoken of, are full of mysterious allusions and tantalising hints to this effect ; references being made to the Mysteries which were only disclosed to those fitted to receive them—not to the multitude—and then only by word of mouth, sometimes even through the understanding rather than the voice. The Epistles of Ignatius to the Trallians and the Philadelphians are also

cited; and Origen against Celsus, at great length. Certainly the expressions used by all these writers are utterly inapplicable to the simple doctrines of what we call the Gospel; they refer to matters deeper, stranger, more mystical altogether. And if it be asked what all these enigmas were about, our reply must be vague and brief. Clement, for instance, professed an acquaintance with the great angelic hierarchies which fill all the realms of being; the distinctions between powers and dominions, thrones and authorities, cherubim, seraphim, and the entire ministry of the Divine Empire. That, to us, is certainly 'hidden' knowledge; but it is not technically occult. The Mysteries proper, as I understand the matter, profess to explain the true meaning and inwardness of all those expressions which are the commonest watchwords of Christianity: Virgin Birth, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Baptism, Conversion, Regeneration, Atonement, the Strait Gate, the Narrow Way, Heaven, and Hell. The

popular or orthodox meanings attached to these words are, we are told, distinctly not the true ones; the true ones being occult, and veiled in allegory. In short, popular Christianity is *a system of symbols mistaken for facts*; and for the facts symbolized we must turn to Theosophy. And that is the affair in a nutshell.

As regards this claim in itself, there is perhaps nothing that need excite our surprise, though something to arouse our suspicion. And any misgiving we may feel is certainly justified when we examine Theosophist teaching about Jesus Christ; the very ground on which we find ourselves is different from what we may have expected, for here it is no longer a question of interpretation—the facts of history itself are impugned, and the first century of the Christian era pushed a century back. Now a tradition exists (and possibly with some foundation) that, 120 years B.C., there lived a certain Essene named Yehoshuah ben Pandira. This person was born in Syria and educated in Egypt, where he was

initiated into the Egyptian Mysteries and had a large acquaintance with, and admiration for, the doctrines of Confucius. The Babylonian Gemara to the Mishna says that he was stoned to death at Ludd, or Lydia, his body being subsequently crucified on a tree on the eve of the Passover, B.C. 70, which would make him just fifty years of age at the time of his martyrdom. In the first and second centuries A.D. the Therapeut monks of Alexandria requisitioned him as a reproduction of the Greek Διώνυσος, who was identical with *Iῆς*, the Phœnician Bacchus,—from whence we derive the sacred monogram IHΣ, which is commonly supposed to consist of the first three letters of the word *Ἰησοῦς* or Jesus.

The Theosophical account is virtually—which means not quite—the same. Discarding the historical Jesus of Nazareth, they, too, tell us of a certain Yehoshuah, who was born 105 years before the Christian era, of poor but respectable parents. Revealing a gravity and thoughtfulness beyond his age, he was placed with a community of

Essenes till he was nineteen, when he entered the Essene monastery on Mount Serbal, where he had full access to a library rich in the philosophies of the Far East. Subsequently he visited Egypt, and there underwent initiation into the Mysteries of the Egyptian form of the Sotapatti ritual—the culmination of which was that the candidate had to lie down upon a large wooden cross, hollowed out so as to receive the human figure. To this his arms were loosely bound, in order to symbolise the voluntary nature of the bondage, and, after passing into a trance, he was raised again the third day. This is the fact, we are told, which eventually became materialized into the legend of an actual crucifixion; the truth being that Yehoshuah was not crucified at all, but stoned, as above related.

As for the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, and other miraculous incidents in the received life of Jesus Christ, these are sufficiently explained by the astronomical and solar myths which lie at the root of so many of the mystical religions; and if the application of the

myth-theory were confined to these, it would be sufficient to say that we had heard all that before. But the Theosophists go much further, as the following instance will show. There is one most practical, matter-of-fact, and in a sense commonplace event recorded in the Gospels—the trial before Pontius Pilate—the explanation of which is so astounding that we must give it in the actual words of our authority. Surely, one would have thought, when we come to deal with the report of a criminal case in a Roman Court of Justice, we are on solid ground; surely there is no scope for solar or astral or any other allegories here! But that is a mistake. We will quote Mr. C. W. Leadbeater, once a clergyman of the Church of England, writing on the clause ‘suffered under Pontius Pilate’ in the Apostles’ Creed; and here are his very words.

“In this clause we have quite the most remarkable instance on record of the degrading and narrowing influence of the tendency” (towards materializing occult phenomena); “for by the insertion of the tiniest letter of the Greek alphabet (the iota) the original meaning has



been not merely obscured, but absolutely lost and forgotten. The alteration is so simple and easy to make, and yet its effects are so extraordinary and so colossal, that those who discovered it could for some time scarcely believe their eyes, and when they *had* grasped the situation, they were unable to comprehend how it had been possible so long to overlook anything so exceedingly obvious.

"Instead of ΠΟΝΤΙΟΥ ΠΙΛΑΤΟΥ the earliest Greek manuscripts which the clairvoyant investigators have yet been able to find, all read ΠΟΝΤΟΥ ΠΙΛΑΤΟΥ. Now the interchange of α and η is by no means infrequent in the Greek dialects, so the only real alteration here is the insertion of the ι, which changes πόντος, meaning a sea, into Πόντιος, which is a Roman proper name.

"It was obvious to the investigators that the Essene monk who first translated the formula into Greek was by no means perfectly acquainted with that tongue, and the result was consequently anything but classical. Men into whose hands the manuscript (or copies of it) came at later periods amended here and there obvious errors in spelling or construction, and it is quite possible that one who approached its consideration with a mind incapable of appreciating its true mystical signification, and filled with the anthropomorphic interpretation, might suppose that in this case, for example, a letter must have been omitted by some ignorant scribe, and so might insert that letter without the least idea that he was thereby changing the entire meaning of the clause and introducing a conception absolutely foreign to the spirit of the whole document.

"The words *πόντος πηλὸς*, then, simply mean a compressed or densified sea—by no means a bad description of the lower part of the Astral Plane, which is so constantly typified by water. The clause usually translated 'suffered under Pontius Pilate' should be rendered 'He endured the dense sea'—that is to say, for us men and for our salvation He allowed Himself to be for the time limited by, and imprisoned in, astral matter."

Elsewhere Mr. Leadbeater speaks of "that unfortunate and much maligned man Pontius Pilate." His authority for all this, observe, is the discovery and examination, *through clairvoyance*, of certain manuscripts that no one else has apparently ever heard of. Perhaps they will be discovered some day on the Physical Plane, by scholars who are not clairvoyant; and when they are, we shall begin to think more highly of Mr. Leadbeater and his peculiar theories than we are able to at present.\*

What, then, in the meantime, should be

\* If "suffering under Pontius Pilate" is a mistake for being submerged in the Densified Sea of astral matter, what is meant by being "set at naught by Herod"? If one trial was a fiction, why not the other? For the sake of consistency, the two events ought to receive the same treatment, if only in fairness to Herod.

our attitude towards Theosophy as a whole? Beyond all doubt, ninety-nine intelligent persons out of a hundred would be inclined to condemn the entire system offhand, one part of it having been seen to be so palpably at variance with the laws of evidence. Here, they would say (and with perfect justice), we are asked to accept an unsupported and most improbable statement by some unknown gentleman concerning certain mysterious documents which no scholar has ever seen or heard of, and about the age, authorship, history, and whereabouts of which he tells us nothing; while on the other hand we have the opposing testimony of four contemporary biographers, and of the two most prominent apostles—both Initiates, on the Theosophist's own showing—to say nothing of the judgment of all the scholars and theologians who have flourished since, including even the contributors to the *Encyclopædia Biblica* of Professor Cheyne. For both the Initiate Peter and the Initiate Paul refer, the one in his speeches and the other in his letter to the

Initiate Timothy, to the trial of Christ before Pilate as an actual historical event; and this may surely be held to invalidate very seriously the authority of the astral manuscripts on which the Theosophical version is based. But, let us in fairness ask ourselves, is it necessary to reject every theory of the system called Theosophy because of a few foolish statements made in connection with one particular aspect of it? In all seriousness, I do not think it is. We do not treat other systems with such rigour, be they philosophical or religious. No one thinks it incumbent on him to repudiate Christianity as a tissue of delusion and imposture because many of the doctrines put forward in its name are an outrage upon common sense. The reality of revelation does not depend on the truth of the story about Habakkuk's hair, or the benevolent meddlesomeness of St. Antony of Padua, or the reprobation of nine-tenths of the human race to hell-fire. A man may be perfectly assured of the therapeutic value of galvanism, and yet disbelieve

totally in the electricized water of Count Mattei as a cure for cancer. A conviction of the action of mind on matter does not prove the holder of such an opinion to be a Christian Scientist, and it is legitimate to differ from Professor Wallace's views as to the finiteness of the universe without denying a single astronomical fact which he holds in common with all astronomers. And so with the question before us. The truth or falsehood of Theosophical teaching on a hundred different points does not turn upon such vagaries as we have alluded to above. When a doctrine, occult or not, is shown to be erroneous by an appeal to historical and unimpeachable fact, that doctrine has to go ; but the doctrines that are left must be fairly and strictly tested on their merits, unprejudiced by their association with those that have been found wanting and cast aside. It does not logically follow that, because a Theosophist is so foolishly credulous as to accept this nonsense about Pontius Pilate being a copyist's blunder for Densified Sea,

and, by implication, to deny the historicity of Christ's trial before a Roman Prætor, the Theosophist teaching about the great Atlantean races of the past is a romantic dream. The objectivity of thought-shapes, the influence of one human mind upon another at a distance of thousands of miles, and the real, though unimaginably subtle, materiality of spirit—thus reducing the entire universe, physical and mental, to a single substance exhibiting itself in various forms and phases—may all very well be true, in spite of untenable theories about the date of Christ's birth, the way in which He spent His early manhood, and the astronomical or astrological origin of the doctrine of parthenogenesis. It is even permissible to accept the Theosophical principle of an occult signification underlying some of the more perplexing sayings of Christ without placing credence in the authenticity of the verbose jargon contained in *Pistis Sophia*. When, therefore, we are confronted with a doctrine which has been held in all ages and in most countries, which

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is implied, even (in one instance) explicitly taught, in the New Testament, which is supported by many strange impressions and experiences, and—most important of all—furnishes a logical and consistent explanation of all the *moral* problems of human life, is it not our duty to accord it earnest and respectful consideration? And such a doctrine is contained in the title of this essay. We refer to the twin-theory of Karma and Reincarnation.

Now what do these words mean? Karma is, literally, action; action in the sense in which we use the term when we speak of the action of one force upon another. The *idea* underlying it would be better expressed by the word Result; for it is the Law of Cause and Effect. Thus, roughly speaking, the Karma of sowing wheat seed will be a crop of wheat; the Karma of studying is erudition; the Karma of doing good is a loftier and purer character. To talk of virtue *gaining* a reward, and of sin *incurring* a punishment, is crudely unphilosophical, implying, as it does, an arbitrary bestowal.

Karma is rather the natural, indefeasible, inevitable result of what we do; and this great law, which runs through the entire moral universe, not only precludes all idea of anything like despotism or caprice, but justifies and explains all those divergencies and inequalities of human destiny that are so great a stumbling-block to thoughtful persons. If I forge a cheque, I may escape punishment at the Central Criminal Court; but the act brings with it a far severer and further-reaching penalty in its natural result—which is, the lowering and weakening of my moral character, *with all the remedial discipline that that entails*. Born under the most unfavourable circumstances, I may rise, by sheer force of will and effort, to a position eminent in art, or literature, or politics; and that is Karma—it is the natural result of my self-denial and perseverance, not the arbitrary conferment of a reward at the hands of some sympathetic ruler. And thus it is that humanity is made to work out its own salvation; only, for so long a struggle, a single



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lifetime of twenty or forty or seventy years does not suffice. If it took God millions of years to make a universe, He can scarcely be expected to produce a perfect man in something less than a century.

And now as regards Reincarnation. This, as the word implies, connotes the reappearance, in successive human forms, of the same individuality or Ego. Thus you, for instance, have lived many lives already, either on this planet or on some other. You may have been an Israelitish slave in Egypt, or one of the Egyptian taskmasters; you may have taken part in the siege of Troy, the foundation of Rome, or the conquest of Babylon; you may have been successively a Chinese literate under the Chou dynasty, a Greek youth in the time of Socrates, a Norman who came over in the train of William the Conqueror, a Puritan soldier under Cromwell, and a victim of revolutionary madness under Robespierre. You may have persecuted your religious opponents, or you may have been burnt at the stake yourself. There is

no knowing, in fact, what your pre-natal antecedents may have been ; but this one thing is sure—that you, as you are to-day, are the sum-total, or rather the quotient, of all the influences to which you have been subjected in ages utterly forgotten and of all the actions which under bygone circumstances you have committed. Who shall weigh, who shall analyse, who shall trace back to their sources, the peculiar characteristics with which you entered upon your present incarnation ? For it is absurd to say that all men are born equal : that the baby's nature is a *tabula rasa*, a blank, virgin sheet with no watermark of its own. Say, rather, that it is like a photographic plate on which a photograph has just been taken ; which *looks* as blank as before it was put into the camera, but which, under the process of development, gradually reveals the picture which in reality lies invisible within it. When a child is born, it appears a senseless mass of humanity, conscious only of discomfort ; but, as it develops, it shows itself possessed of powers, and tastes,

and preferences, and idiosyncrasies which differentiate it from every other child in the whole world. Why is one child naturally truthful and another a born liar, one pious from its birth and another an inveterate pagan, one the soul of generosity and another a mass of selfishness? Where do these innate, inherent attributes come from? Heredity fails to account for them. Parents of Bœotian stupidity may give birth to a genius, parents of genius may produce dolts and dunces. A great reformer, a consummate artist, a scientific discoverer, a poet whose eyes are open to the Beatific Vision, may be launched into the world through the channel of an insignificant and wholly inferior ancestry. The son of a saint is often a scoundrel, and the daughter of a rogue may grow up into a woman like Elizabeth Fry, or Mrs. General Booth, or St. Catherine of Siena. No *olla podrida* of ancestral characteristics can account for the mental and moral peculiarities of any human being ; they are his own, proper and personal to himself, and, according to

the Karmic Law of Reincarnation, are the result of the discipline he has undergone, the actions he has committed, and the opportunities he has used or misapplied, in the course of many previous existences now irretrievably forgotten.

Forgotten? Well—as a general rule, forgotten. But not invariably or wholly. There are those who tell us of strange experiences, of inexplicable impressions, even of mysterious dreams, that suggest the idea of some faint, shrouded memory. I could fill many pages with instances of these supernormal phenomena by simply reproducing them from other people's works ; but as they are already published there would be nothing gained by publishing them a second time. I will therefore confine myself to recounting three facts, two of which have come under my own observation. A young man whom I once met was in the habit of having a very curious dream, which used to recur at intervals. He fancied himself in a small, barely furnished room, with stone walls and one narrow

window. With him were always two stern-looking men who never spoke. Often he would look out of the window and feast his eyes longingly upon the fair sunlit landscape that lay outside and far below ; but he could never get at it, and his appeals to the two grim men were received in contemptuous silence. Then, after many days, the door would open, and a third man of still more ill-omened appearance enter the apartment ; and the three would *take him away*—whither, he never knew, for at that juncture he always woke. Well, one evening, at some party or other, he met an elderly gentleman, who looked at him somewhat curiously, but whom he did not know. “I think we have met before,” remarked the stranger.—“I don’t remember having had the pleasure,” replied the young man.—“Ah ! perhaps not ; it was a very long time ago. But I recollect it well. It was during the French Revolution ; you were a prisoner in the Conciergerie, and were eventually guillotined. I was”—I forget who the old gentleman had been ;

possibly one of the gaolers. But those are the facts. The terrible events of his previous incarnation reproduced themselves in the young man's dreaming consciousness, and by a strange chance he fell in with a person who had been connected with those events, and who had the rare faculty of remembering them in his succeeding life.

The next instance is equally suggestive. There is a little girl of four or five years old, whose father is a clergyman in Wales, and who is constantly puzzling her parents by referring to occurrences they never even heard of. And to their perplexed inquiries as to what she can possibly be thinking about, the child replies, "Ah, that was before I came. That happened when I was waiting to come. I remember that when I was somewhere else."

One more example may be mentioned. Some years ago, during a séance held at Courcelles in France, two spirits presented themselves, who said, "The period of our sojourn on the plane we now occupy is

drawing to a close. In a very short time we shall be reincarnated in your world. We shall both be born into the same family, at a certain house in such-and-such a street in the town of Orleães. One of us will have a very short life, the other a very long one." No time was lost on the part of some of those present at the séance in repairing to Orleans, and instituting inquiries. The house and the street indicated were discovered without difficulty, and the fact established that the wife of the occupier had just been delivered of twins. One of the children died a few days after its birth; the other, when last heard of, was a vigorous and strapping boy of eight, giving every promise that the prediction above alluded to would be fulfilled.

That the doctrine of Reincarnation was held by the Jews, and received both the implicit and explicit endorsement of Christ Himself, must be patent to all students of the New Testament. On one occasion the disciples asked Him a question which, apart

from the existence of such a belief, can only be regarded as one of unparalleled stupidity. "Master," said they, "which did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"—an inquiry implying, at first sight, either that the man had sinned before he existed, or else that his blindness was a punishment for sin that he was pre-ordained to commit subsequently. But the disciples meant nothing of the sort; they were thinking of some sin he might conceivably have committed in a previous life, which was bearing its natural fruit in the life he was then living. And Christ did not repudiate the theory; He only told them that in that particular instance it was not sin which had occasioned the man's affliction, but the accomplishment or effectuation of a different and very special purpose. In which connection it may be desirable to point out that the Law of Karma by no means exclusively produces a retributive consequence of sin, but may equally act in the direction of discipline, by eventuating in such peculiarities of circumstance, oppor-



tunity, or surroundings, whether pleasurable or not, as are required for the correction of some moral weakness or the furtherance of some growing virtue; and the possibility of this, in the case of the man born blind, is in no way interdicted by the words of Christ. Then we have the popular rumours as to who Christ Himself was, current among the Jews. "Who do men say that I am?" And the reply was significant: "Some say you are Elias, some say John the Baptist, others that you are Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Here again we have incontrovertible evidence that the Jews regarded reincarnation as part of the regular order of nature, and again we note the omission, on the part of Christ, to condemn the belief as false. But the classical instance is the identification, by Christ, of John the Baptist with Elijah. One of the stock arguments of the scribes against the Messiahship of Christ appears to have been that, according to Malachi, the Messiah was to have been preceded by the reappearance on earth of the



sternest of the Israelitish prophets; and the disciples, evidently at a loss for an answer, took the difficulty to Christ. "The scribes are quite right," He replied; "Elijah was certainly to reappear; but the fact is he has already done so, only they never recognised him, and treated him accordingly—for *John the Baptist was Elias*, who was for to come." Now nothing could be clearer than this. And we find a further reference to it in *Pistis Sophia*, which shows at any rate what the early belief upon the subject was. The passage runs as follows. It is Christ who is speaking.

Moreover, in the region of the souls of the Rulers, destined to receive it, I found the soul of the prophet Elias, in the æons of the sphere; and I took him, and receiving his soul also, I brought it to the Virgin of Light, and she gave it to her receivers; they brought it to the sphere of the Rulers, and cast it into the womb of Elizabeth. Wherefore the power of the Little Iao, who is in the midst, and the soul of the prophet Elias, are united with the body of John the Baptist. For this cause have ye been in doubt aforetime, when I said to you, "John said, 'I am not the Christ'"; and ye said to me, "It is written in the Scriptures that when the Christ shall

come Elias shall come before Him and prepare His way." And I, when ye had said this unto me, replied : "Elias verily is come, and hath prepared all things, according as it is written, and they have done unto him whatsoever they would." And when I perceived that ye did not understand that I had spoken concerning the soul of Elias united with John the Baptist, I answered you openly and face to face, with the words, "If ye will receive it, John the Baptist is Elias, who, I said, was for to come."

And there are very few people who will receive it even now, in spite of Christ's clear and unmistakable assertion that such was indeed the case. One must not overlook the difficulty suggested by the fact that Elias appeared *in propria personâ* upon the Mount of Transfiguration, apparently in his astral body. But it is noteworthy that Christ's identification of him with John the Baptist seems to have taken place immediately after his apparition on that occasion, and it is permissible to conclude from this that, after the death of John, his spirit reverted to its former tenancy. There is something appropriate, too, in the idea of the shaggy Tishbite being temporarily reincarnated in

the rugged Baptist. It suggests the possibility of the prophet Samuel having reappeared, many centuries later, in the person of John Knox.

But how, it will be asked, is Christ's assertion that John the Baptist was a reincarnation of Elijah to be reconciled with John's own flat denial of it? We all remember the passage—another instance, it may be remarked, of the prevalence of the belief among the Jews. "Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No." Of course the reply is simple. Those who remember their former lives are the rare, the very rare, exceptions; and John the Baptist denied being Elijah simply because he had no recollection of it, and was, in fact, as ignorant of his earlier career as each of us is of what we were in our own previous existences. There is no difficulty here. John did not know that he was Elijah, because he had forgotten all about it; Christ did know it, because He knew all things, and He stated

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the fact as plainly as any man could speak.

And now let us look at the subject from an ethical point of view. No fact of human life, probably, has given rise to such perplexity and heart-searching as the inequalities of individual destiny. As has been shrewdly said, there are some persons who appear to be not so much born into the world as damned into it; as though, having sinned grievously in some former state, this world were the hell that had received them after death. One child is born in the slums, its father a thief and its mother a prostitute; it is brought up in an atmosphere of physical and moral filth; and for years—perhaps for its whole life—never knows one moment of pure happiness or undefiled enjoyment. Another finds itself surrounded by physical comfort or even luxury, and is reared in an atmosphere of physical and moral purity. A third bursts upon the world a consummate genius; a fourth is weighted with fatal and impenetrable stupidity; a fifth has splendid

opportunities, but a defect of temperament that leads him to misuse or neglect them ; while a sixth plods heavily through life, his talents just sufficient to enable him to pay his way, but inadequate to elevate him in the moral, spiritual, or intellectual sphere. One is born to millions, another to the most sordid penury ; one to mental affluence, another to sainthood, and yet another to the lowest and most degrading appetites ; and the question that is universally asked but never answered, is, Where is the *justice* of it all ?

Apart from the Karmic Law of Reincarnation, there *is* no justice in it ; nothing but the grossest and grotesquest cruelty, favouritism, and caprice. And this, too, whether the directing agency be God or Chance. No philosophy, no religion, has any explanation of the problem that is not an insult to one's common sense. But Theosophy has an answer which is both satisfactory and conclusive. It traces the history of each individual soul, or Ego, through the lowest forms of life, and shows us how far that soul

has responded to the stimuli that have been brought to bear upon it, and the results, good or bad, that have accrued from the use made of its opportunities. We are enabled to follow the fortunes of that soul through all the successive phases of its career, to recognise the bad and the good Karma it has produced in various incarnations, to note the falls and the struggles and the advances which have marked its spiral ascent; and what do we find? We find that its present social and moral condition represents the exact balance of all these complicated influences and forces; that it *could* be in no other position than that it actually occupies; that the goodness or the badness, the strength or the weakness, the suffering or the enjoyment, the intelligence or the stupidity—the circumstances, whatever they may be, that environ it, and the characteristics which make it what it is—all, all combine together to represent a sum-total of its previous doings, a sum-total as accurate as any presented in the balance-sheet of a

commercial company. When, therefore, we contemplate the birth of a child amid unfavourable surroundings, we need not lash ourselves into a state of indignation at the cruelty or injustice that has so decreed it ; we are able, on the contrary, to view the event quite calmly, as the natural and inevitable outcome of the child's own previous history. Nor need we look upon the dispensation, however painful, as necessarily punitive ; it may be purely disciplinary, the soul requiring, for its due development, the experience of impure or disagreeable associations ; and in this case we shall see the slum-child gradually freeing itself from the defilement around it, exercising an influence for good upon its neighbours, and developing perhaps into a skilful workman, or a hard-headed politician, or even a broad-minded philanthropist. That victory over degradation will involve a big stride upward, and in its next incarnation the result will be very great. And so with every case. Take a young man born to weighty responsibilities ;



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he may be a country nobleman, or the breadwinner of a helpless family, or a large employer of labour, or perhaps, let us say, a Czar. Evidently, his is a soul that requires that particular discipline ; a discipline that shall give strength and balance to the character ; and the way in which he uses the opportunity so offered will determine his position when he appears in earth-life again. In fact, illustrations might be adduced indefinitely. One thing only need be borne in mind : a man has not necessarily been a scoundrel in his past lives because he is born into unpleasant circumstances in this one. And even when this is the case, the punishment he suffers is not an act of vengeance, but simply a *consequence* of his sin ; as much a consequence as the inefficiency of a limb that has been injured ; while the infliction of it is remedial, and makes for growth.

St. Paul speaks of "all things working together for good." Had this phrase an occult signification when used by the great Initiate ? Was he referring to the Law of

Karma? Whether or no, the Theosophical theory endorses, emphasises, and illustrates the doctrine very remarkably. Everything that happens to us is, from the Theosophical standpoint, an *opportunity*; whether it be an annoyance of the most trivial nature, or a serious disaster, or a piece of good luck, or a crisis of the highest importance. An Italian friend of the writer has recently published some rather suggestive remarks upon this point, which are not only extremely practical but charmingly naïve in their simplicity. He is giving an instance of how we may produce good Karma, and how the most trifling incident brings out the result of past Karma; and this is how he does it. Let us suppose, he says, that a house-painter, passing somebody in the street, has the misfortune to upset a pot of paint over his coat. The injured party flies into a rage, storms at the man, and threatens to give him a thrashing. The painter excuses himself, pointing out that he did not do it on purpose; but the other, his anger unabated,

retorts that the man's intentions are no concern of his, and that what he is thinking of is the damage done to his clothes. Well, now ; do you think, asks the essayist, that the house-painter, the paint-pot, and the ruined suit of clothes have anything to do with the anger of the person who suffered? No ; the anger was in him, in his nature, in his character ; the thing that occurred to him did no more than produce the same effect as is produced by a spark in the touch-hole of a cannon—for, unless a cannon is loaded, no explosion will follow. Suppose, however, that the house-painter had happened to soil the clothes of another person in the same manner ; and that this person, though annoyed at the misfortune, knowing that it was only an accident, felt no resentment, and passed on without uttering any remonstrance. Then, remembering that the loss of the paint might be a serious affair for the poor man, suppose he turned back, gave him money to pay for it, and thus felt satisfaction at having done a kindly action. Well, there we see two

different methods of using the same opportunity ; one man produces good Karma, the other bad. Or suppose, again, that a man is unjustly accused of a crime by someone else. It is the accuser who really suffers, for he produces bad Karma ; while the accused reaps, or should reap, benefit from it, for it is an opportunity for him to produce good Karma. Nor need he be irritated and exasperated by the thought that the injury is undeserved. True, the accusation itself is false ; but he may be perfectly sure that, in some way or other, he has deserved the trouble. The Law of Karma never errs ; it is never unjust, never useless or superfluous ; the man experiences pain because he deserves to, and he deserves to because it is necessary for him that his self-control, or power of serenity, should be developed ; and if he does not profit by the experience it will be to his spiritual detriment, since, *the pain being inherent in what he lacks*, the greater his lack the oftener and the more severely he will feel the pain. It therefore

follows that no misfortune that can possibly befall us ought, logically, to cause us the least uneasiness; knowing (as we should) that it is inevitable, that it is exactly and precisely what is necessary for us, and that it affords us a golden opportunity to make a great step upward in our evolution—an evolution that is to continue through many earth-lives after we have done with this one, and, having passed the grave and gate of Death, have entered upon new surroundings and a far higher and more glorious career.

In conclusion: I submit—first, that there is nothing in the Theosophical doctrine of Karma and Reincarnation (for the two are inseparable) which conflicts with New Testament teaching, while there is much in the New Testament that affords it the fullest support; and secondly, that the doctrine relieves us of all those distressing perplexities and trials to faith occasioned by the apparent injustice involved in the inequalities of human destiny. We believe, vaguely, in the Reign of Law; here the Law is seen in operation,

and is recognisable as unswervingly beneficent and just. When Abraham exclaimed, in indignant remonstrance, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" the Judge of all the earth is represented as having been on the point of doing something very much the reverse of right—of punishing the innocent with the guilty—and as having only been turned from His purpose by the intervention of one of His own creatures. But we, in the light of this Law, can use the phrase in the sense of an assured and proven fact. Whatever happens to us, we have deserved ; and it happens to us in order that we may use it as an opportunity to be taken advantage of. The more we serve others, the more rapid will be our own advance ; and the higher we rise, the more service we shall be able to render to others. Or in Biblical language : Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap ; he who loveth his soul shall lose it, but whoso loseth his soul shall keep it unto life eternal. It is the man who forgets himself and his own interests in

devotion to the good of his fellows that reaps the great reward ; in the present life, as well as in the lives which are to come.

“ Then spake he of that answer all must give  
 For all things done amiss or wrongfully,  
 Alone, each for himself, reckoning with that  
 The fixed arithmetic of the universe,  
 Which meteth good for good, and ill for ill,  
 Measure for measure unto deeds, words, thoughts,  
 Making all futures fruits of all the pasts.”

# The Higher Agnosticism

## I

TENNYSON, poet and philosopher, apostrophising a flower that he had plucked out of the crannies of a wall, surmised that could he know that plant itself, "root and all and all in all," he would "know what God and man is." God, and man ; that is how Tennyson summed up the Great Mystery of All Things. The phrase serves ; but it wants preciser definition. The content of All Things is infinitely complex ; is everything included in the formula ' God and man ' ? Space, Time, Force, Motion, Will, Matter, Substance, Eternity, Causality, Spirit, Being, the Absolute ; where do these come in ? Are they subjective impressions inherent in man, or



are they objective realities which form part of God? What is God? Whence does Force come? Who ordains the sequence of Cause and Effect? Is Force the result of Will? And is Will an evidence of Purpose? How does Substance project itself upon our consciousness as Matter? What is Matter, and what is its relation to Force? Is Time a subjective delusion—is there no difference between Past, Present, and Future, nothing but a baffling and incomprehensible Eternal Now? Is Motion an absolute fact, or only relative and hypothetical? Is there no such thing as Space? Is the distance between our planet and Sirius a mode of human subjectivity and nothing more? Here be riddles of the Sphinx, and the answers to them are bewilderingly conflicting. But, says Tennyson, if he could only have understood the essential inwardness of a fragile wall-flower, there would have been nothing left for him to learn.

A great truth, tersely put. The plant, with its complicated mechanism of leaves, petals, sepals, pistils, capillaries, stem and

root, grew, nobody knows how, out of a small, hard, homogeneous grain or seed. The botanist can describe the process, step by step, but he cannot tell us why the influences of the enclosing medium, whether soil or brick, should produce such a magical result, or how the thing is done. And then, whence came the seed? We can trace, by a scientific use of the imagination, its transcendent ancestry—trace it back through geologic eras to the primeval nebula, back to the time when solids and fluids did not exist, when organic and inorganic were expressions of no meaning, when the first great crash that was, some day, to produce heat and motion and being and life had not yet reverberated through the vast emptiness. We can do this, I say, by dint of inferential reasoning, and the adoption for our purpose of the What-must-have-been; but even then we have only skimmed the surface. These cosmic processes, this wonderful evolutionary drama, these colossal and resistless changes and on-movings of a pregnant mysterious

monad which eventuate in throbbing souls and virile intellects are but results, phenomena, symptoms ; the hidden motive-power, the why, the how, and the what, remain as close a secret as ever. Can the play and rebound of molecules produce *Paradise Lost*, or the bombardment of a disc by electrons the rhapsody of martyrs at the stake? May we trace the pedigree of patriotism or poetic genius as we trace the pedigree of a seed, pursuing both to a common origin? Even so, the working of the machine is all that we perceive ; its mainspring remains invisible. We know nothing of the palpitating Vigour which courses through the veins of the universe ; we see it in its effects, but the Vigour itself eludes us. We are like some peasant in front of a great engine in full swing. He sees the rising and the falling, the whirling and the flying, he is deafened by the rumbles and the hisses of the huge moving complexity ; but the thing is a profound mystery to him, because he knows nothing of the steam or the electricity that sets the organism in

motion, nothing of the brain that planned it or the purposive and expert skill that arranged the parts in order and keeps them working harmoniously for one common end.

Some of us, indeed, are occasionally tempted to complain that matters are made more difficult for us than they really are; that the metaphysician, for instance, will deny the actuality of some obvious and simple fact on which our most fundamental experiences are based. Now there is no root-idea more deeply embedded in human consciousness than the idea of time. To question the reality of time—that is, virtually to deny that yesterday preceded to-day and that to-day will be followed by to-morrow—is, to the natural man, as great an outrage as to deny that two and two are four. And the injury is all the greater when we come to examine the fine-spun and elusive character of the dialectics employed to support the astounding theory. No idealist, of course, *acts* on his professed belief. Indeed, he couldn't if he tried to. Nor will he seriously deny that a cause must,

not only logically, but chronologically, precede its effect. But he will assure us that all these are human conceptions merely, and are necessary because of our intellectual limitations. Time, says Kant, is the form of our sensibility as both external and internal. We cannot conceive things as existing except as existing in time; but we *can* conceive time as existing even if all things were annihilated. Things are subjected to our sensibility in *succession*; that is the form of our sensibility. As, therefore, this is the indispensable form with which we invest objects presented to us, it is evident that the form does not reside in the materials, and is therefore not deducible from experience; in other words, it is a pure intuition; and, being such, it has *no existence out of our sensibility*.\* The theory is clear enough; the idea of time is *a priori*, and therefore it has no independent existence. In fact, if we had no limitations—for this is what it comes to—if, that is, we were God—we should see everything at once; every-

\* Refer G. H. Lewes, *passim*.

thing would be present to us in one momentary flash. That such a momentary flash must, from the very nature of things, last for ever, suggests a very curious view of history, whether cosmical, geological, or human, the future as well as the past. The presumption of time, says Kant, cannot possibly be derived from experience, for the simple reason that all experience presupposes it. To the plain man it certainly appears that so fundamental and universal a presupposition is *primâ facie* evidence of its truth, especially as the presupposition is borne out by every subsequent experience, not only in the individual but by a consensus of the entire human race. And the arguments adduced to prove that time is a sense-perception only find their analogue in those which seek to reduce space to the same subjective level. What, one asks, are Kant and the idealists trying to prove? If there is no space, there is no universe; nothing, in short, exists. And yet no Kantist believes anything so absurd. Let such logic be as irresistible as it may, the only result is

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to show of what strange chimæras logic is the prolific parent.

What is Eternity? Duration which has neither beginning nor end. Let it be symbolised by a line, endless in both directions. Treat this line like a yard measure by marking it off into minutes, hours, days, months, years, centuries, millenniums, kalpas and cycles, and that is time. And, so far from time and space being mental abstractions only with no answering realities, they each afford a proof of the existence of the other. Introduce motion—another fundamental conception—and we find that the visible universe is, in one aspect of it, a huge clock. The movements of the moon in connection with the earth give us our months, the movements of the earth in connection with the sun provide us with days and years. Time is therefore measured—I had almost written manufactured—*by* motion *in* space. What, then, is gained by attempting to disprove the reality of these most palpable and obvious truths? There would be some reason in it,

of course, if experience of time were neither uniform nor universal. Supposing a race of men were to be discovered who had no idea of the difference between past and present, to whom the events of a thousand years were always manifest in a sort of clairvoyant vision, and who saw the future so clearly as never to be quite sure whether it had happened or not, then there might be some justification for reconsidering our own notions of time and space. But hitherto no beings so exceptionally endowed have been unearthed.

Of course, there is a way in which we may—and, in fact, actually do—witness events that are past. A few months ago, something that looked like a big bright star flamed out in the heavens, and then gradually disappeared. The 'star' was really a conflagration, and the conflagration had occurred in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. That is to say, we actually saw something occurring that was not occurring, but that had occurred more than three hundred years ago; the collision which gave rise to the outburst



had long since come to an end, and the fire we were watching had been extinguished for centuries. But that, so far from proving that time is a fiction of our sensibility, proves the reality of space and, with it, the reality of time ; for as light takes a second to travel 180,000 miles, the distance traversed can be calculated, and the time it took to traverse it accounted for. And thus—theoretically, of course—if we could only get far enough from the earth, and were provided with telescopes sufficiently powerful, it would be possible for us to re-invoke any scene in history in which we felt an interest. There is a spot in space which the light that left this earth say two thousand years ago is only reaching at this moment. Shift the spot, and you would be able to witness events which took place in the Middle Ages, or the patriarchal period, or the palæontologic eras. Thus the whole of earth's past history could be reviewed, and the actual events, not a repetition of them, the events occurring, not *as* they occurred, witnessed at our ease. The

'Higher' critic would then have no more doubts as to what took place on the Resurrection morning, for he would be able himself to see the sepulchre, and watch the arrival of Peter and John and the Magdalen, though he might not hear their words; the student of Homer could assist at the siege of Troy, the historian clear up the vexed palisade question by surveying the battle of Senlac, and, in short, all historic mysteries be solved. But this again would not prove the imaginariness of time; it would simply prove the length of time it takes for light to travel, and, incidentally, the reality of time itself.

The metaphysician will reply that this is all very well, but that it does not touch the point, because it is no answer to his arguments. Of course it isn't. To argue on metaphysical lines is to argue for ever, without proving anything one way or another. Such undertakings afford admirable practice in dialectics, but their results are barren. We find ourselves landed in a recognition of the identity of Being and Non-Being, the

conception of Thought apart from a Thinker or anything thought about, and God as the Absolute Nothing or Immanent Negative. It is the empirical or experimental method which in the last resort decides the question for each individual investigator. Lotze analyses the position with his usual rather verbose good sense. "Time," he says in his *Microcosmus*, "in the unchanging swiftness of its course, seems to us to be the common measure of all motions; and though, did Nature not offer us a series of measurable recurrences of absolutely similar phenomena, we should be unable to divide the length of time and compare the magnitude of its parts, yet to the view of our imagination the time so won inevitably becomes transformed into the independent and naturally divided standard in whose sections we distribute the sum of all that is done. In the developing of these conceptions we are more or less aided by the nature of our experience, and I have had here no intention of denying this gradual development of our ideas of space and time

or of describing them as an inherent possession of human phantasy. But they would not have been developed if external experiences were not met by the tendency of our mind to see everywhere in things, phenomena, and events a fixed inherent measure and right—a tendency slow to be convinced by science of what is often only the relative value of its estimations.” And there we may leave the subject.

## II

It will, therefore, be both safe and practical when, in these inquiries, we have to deal with any fact that is beyond all reach of doubt, not to waste our time in trying to disprove its possibility, but just to accept it on the basis of common sense. A scientific belief may be erroneous, as we all know. Even the irresistibility of a belief is no proof of its correctness. The geocentric theory of the solar system, for example, was an utterly mistaken theory. But it was refuted, not by metaphysics, but by observation. Let Real-

ists and Idealists wrangle as they please ; whichever side may get the better of the other is a matter of the purest indifference to the man of science, whose discoveries are as little affected by metaphysical logomachies as by theological traditions. There is much that we are totally unable to realise which we yet know to be true ; let us, therefore, *first* keep our minds on solid facts, and see whither they are leading us, and, *secondly*, try to discover how much of what is now debateable ground may eventually be added to the region of solid fact, recognised by scientists as such.

Now less than a hundred years ago there were many thousands of people in England who, curiously enough, looked upon any excursion beyond the limits of their own very circumscribed horizon as *impious*. The exact connexion between advance in knowledge and impiety is not very easy to define ; but their idea seems to have been that to do, or try to do, anything that in those unenlightened days was novel, wonderful, or startling, was

to encroach upon the prerogatives of the Almighty. Thus, a member of Parliament denounced as impious the notion that it might be possible for a train to travel at the rate of thirty or forty miles an hour ; God had given us horses, and horses were evidently intended by an all-wise Providence to draw stage-coaches, so that to discard these heavenly provisions for a snorting machine that would fly over the country at least three or four times as rapidly was akin to tempting the Lord. The same cogent reasoning was advanced against the use of anæsthetics ; God intended that, under certain circumstances, men and (more especially) women should suffer, so that to evade that suffering was flat rebellion against the Divine decrees. The superstition is not even yet dead, as we shall see further on ; at present we will confine ourselves to a very brief and inadequate review of just a few discoveries, a few steps in advance, that have been made during the last two or three years, and that without any accusation being hurled at the discoverers of

repeating the blasphemy of Babel.\* On the contrary, the general effect seems rather to have been to heighten our astonishment at the marvels of Creation and, incidentally, our conception of the Creator.

Now when we think of Infinity, we have a vague picture before us of expansion boundlessly large; there is, perhaps, something mathematically absurd in the idea of the infinitely little. And yet our ideas of the minute have been wonderfully stimulated in recent times. We have been brought to realise that not only is there a universe beyond the reach of any telescope that can ever be constructed, but, if not a universe, at any rate a region of complex material activity, which eludes the most powerful microscope. The conception of the infinitely great affects us as the rarefied atmosphere of lofty summits affects the mountaineer; it is too fine for us to breathe. The conception of the infinitely little gives one a sense of suffocation; we seem penetrating into the

\* Gen. xi. 4.

very veins and bowels of matter—deeper and deeper down, further and further in—discovering fresh dungeon-worlds beyond or within each other, and all enclosed in a minute spherule compared with which a mustard-seed is an enormous globe. Let us consider, for instance, what is involved in the properties of the extraordinary substance known as radium. Now an atom of radium, like an atom of any other element, is invisibly minute. Yet, small as it is, it is full of far, far smaller bodies called electrons, which bear the same proportion to the atom which contains them as grains of sand bear to a church. That is to say : fill a church with sand, from pavement to roof, from reredos to the western door—how many grains of sand will there be in the building? Nobody knows. But there are, approximately, as many electrons in an atom of radium as there are grains of sand in that church ; the actual size, therefore, of these infinitesimal corpuscles is beyond all power of the human mind to imagine. Further, they are all in violent



motion—which implies the existence of vacant spaces between them; they are also lustrous, and fiercely hot; they are being perpetually catapulted out of the radium at the rate of millions per second, with the same velocity as light; and this amazing combustion goes on uninterruptedly for ever, without consumption of material or diminution of force. Here, then, we are brought face to face with a phenomenon which is absolutely new to science, and it unquestionably looks as if certain scientific principles which have hitherto been regarded as axiomatic might have to be restated.

Size, of course, is relative; there is no absolute standard by which it can be gauged. But it is clear that the demonstration above referred to of the existence of bodies so unimaginably more exiguous than had ever been conceived of before must modify very seriously our ideas of matter and its divisibility. Here we have particles endowed with heat, light, force, and tremendous activity. Imagine, added to these attributes,

that of consciousness. We should then be confronted with untold swarms of invisible living creatures, in respect to which an ordinary garden ant would swell to the dimensions of a fabulous and gigantic monster, the size of a respectable continent. There is not the slightest ground, as far as I am aware, for postulating the existence of sentient beings so minute, but neither is there any absurdity in supposing the possibility of it. Size has no standard but that which one applies to it from one's own experience. We talk of a great big cat and of a tiny little pony, in spite of the fact that the pony is at least twenty times as large as the cat, and certainly there are microscopic insects to which the smallest mosquito must appear a very terrible winged dragon. There are countless spheres of being on this physical plane which partly overlap each other, but the inhabitants of which have very little mutual acquaintance. We have our own ideas of mosquitoes, and very narrow and prejudiced ideas they doubtless are; if we

knew more of the inner life of mosquitoes we might possibly respect them more, and even take sufficient interest in them to wonder what mosquitoes think of us. The point, however, is this: that we are surrounded by spheres of being of which we know little or nothing, but the possibilities affecting which are almost infinite; and if, as we are assured is the case, the spaces between the molecules of solid matter are proportionately as vast as the spaces between star and star, we have miniature universes in every material object that we touch—universes, too, which may as well be inhabited as not.

But it is not only the exiguity of the corpuscles shot off by radium that constitutes a revelation of wonder. The substance is self-luminous, self-incandescent; the heat it emits is tremendous; and it expends this immense amount of caloric and activity incessantly without being consumed—like a sort of Burning Bush. To be more strictly accurate, one cubic centimetre of it can go on for one hundred million years without

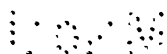
losing more than a milligramme of its weight; and that is practical perpetuity. Thus we have heat without combustion, output without exhaustion, activity with no assignable cause, expenditure without diminution of bulk—a veritable oversetting of some of the most cherished articles of scientific faith! And when, in other directions, we find it possible to see into solid matter, to turn the air we breathe into liquid we might drink, and to transmit messages through the ether without conducting wires, we certainly are justified in the belief that very rapid strides are being made towards a solution of one of the profoundest mysteries of existence. What, in the last resort, is matter? Professor Haeckel, who calls himself a monist and repudiates materialism, tells us that the universe consists of one unique substance, which projects itself upon our consciousness under the two forms of matter and spirit. He believes that this substance is the Ultimate Fact of Nature, that it is self-existent, and that it has revealed itself under these two

aspects from all eternity. "This universal substance shows us two different aspects of its being, or two fundamental attributes—matter (infinitely *extended* substance), and spirit (the all-embracing energy of *thought*)." This, which Haeckel adopts—enthusiastically—from Spinoza, he calls the loftiest, profoundest, and truest thought of all ages. But the new discoveries render this view no longer tenable without qualification; no longer tenable, that is, in the sense in which he holds it. In a former work the present writer ventured to suggest that matter was simply force raised to the *n*th degree. Take force from the Ultimate Unit of matter—be it atom, electron, or what you will—and the Unit would cease to exist; for matter and force are inseparable. "Matter has no independent existence whatever. It is simply force in action, force made visible, force corporealized. Its best definition would be *consolidated force*; so that it is just as absurd to try and abstract force from matter in order to see what matter would do and how it

would look without it, as it would be to try and abstract all the water from a block of pure ice, and expect to retain some solid substance or precipitate."

It would appear that this was not very far from the truth. The suspicion is gaining ground that matter is composed of electrons, or points of electric force, and it has been stated by no less an authority than Sir Oliver Lodge that an electric charge possesses the fundamental property of matter—*i.e.*, inertia or mass; so that, if any charge were sufficiently concentrated, it might represent any amount of matter. In other words, mass or inertia can be accounted for electrically; there is no other way of accounting for it, and this is as much as to say that mass is concentrated force.

So much for the latest opinion on the subject, based on physical research. Let us now glance at the teaching which claims to explain physics from *behind*—from the hidden or esoteric side. Like Haeckel and Spinoza, the Theosophist recognises but one universal



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Substance, and like Spinoza but unlike Haeckel he calls this substance God. Of this substance matter and spirit are the two manifested modes, spirit being consciousness and matter its vehicle; their essence and origin, however, are one. This being so, it follows that spirit is simply matter in a highly subtle, tenuous, and rarefied form; to us, on the physical plane, invisible and intangible, but material for all that; so that, to put it roughly, a *thought* is a *thing*, and, on its own plane, as material as a stone is on ours. Bodies are but ideas, said Berkeley; ideas are actually bodies, says the Theosophist. Accept this theory—provisionally—and such phenomena as telepathy are at once explained. A thought from one brain flies to, and effects a lodgment in, another brain, [just as a bullet shot from a gun finds its lodgment in a target,] or a marconigram arrives safely at the receiving-station. Light is also thrown, by this theory, on that hitherto little-comprehended fact, the influence of mind on matter; the passage from the phenomena

of consciousness to the corresponding changes in cerebral tissue will be no longer unthinkable when it is once proved that both are fundamentally identical. And there is one other problem, hitherto a formidable stumbling-block to many, a solution of which may be found in the new postulate. Popular theistic feeling about the origin of all things is often crudely expressed in the formula, "God must have made the world because the world could not have made itself." That is to say, self-existence is regarded as a natural attribute of spirit, but as quite impossible for matter. Why? Why should spirit be regarded as self-existent from all eternity, and matter dependent for its existence upon spirit? Why should not matter be similarly self-existent? Again, how could pure spirit—consciousness—create or produce gross matter? But if both are fundamentally the same, these difficulties vanish. Belonging to different planes, they no longer form separate categories. Just as steam condenses into water and water hardens into ice, so



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may the very finest and most tenuous forms of psychoplasm pass by slow degrees into the densest varieties of mass.

But here we are immediately confronted by a new difficulty, so obvious that it will already have struck the reader. If spirit be rarefied matter, and matter concentrated force, what is the relation between force and spirit? Clearly, this must be decided somehow; for, as the argument stands, we have actually offered two explanations of the constitution of matter which are mutually incompatible. If matter be concentrated force, it is evident that we have no room for spirit; and if spirit be attenuated matter, then the latter is independently accounted for. The contradiction, however, is only apparent, and the solution of it will be found in a new definition of force. What *is* force, in the last resort? The reply is simplicity itself. Force is nothing more or less than spirit *in action*. Life, consciousness, will, purpose—these all lie at the back of that sum of existences we call the Universe, and are to be recognised

as well in the slow processes of evolution as in the brain of the mathematician, or the fluctuating sensitiveness of a bar of steel.

### III

We now come to a point in our argument connected with a subject which we should have felt some reluctance in broaching had it not recently been made respectable by the late Mr. Frederic Myers. But since the publication of *Human Personality* any attempt to assume an attitude of sovereign scorn towards the phenomena called spiritualistic can only recoil on those who make it. We may also refer, in this connection, to Dr. Zöllner's *Transcendental Physics*, a work of which, as far as we are aware, no refutation has been published. Now the attitude of scientific men, *as a class*, towards these phenomena has hitherto been unscientific in the extreme. "We do not believe in your so-called spirits," has been their contemptuous reply to all requests for investigation, "and

whether they be spirits or no they talk such puerile trash that we really cannot waste our time in listening to it." Was there ever such bad logic? Was ever point so crudely missed? The prime question to be considered is *not* whether certain phenomena are caused by spirits—that is, dead people—still less whether such people talk sense or nonsense. What claims attention and investigation is the undoubted fact that certain physical phenomena do occur, under certain circumstances, which are absolutely inexplicable by any known law of physical science ; and one would have thought that, instead of avoiding all personal experience of such phenomena, physicists would have pounced upon them, only too eager to investigate what gave such rich promise of great scientific discoveries. Instead of which, they have imitated the mediæval friar who refused to look through a telescope lest he should see something that had not been mentioned by Aristotle. They have repeated the illogical folly of those whom they most justly despise ;

they have assumed the same attitude towards transcendental physics, spiritualism, and even telepathy, as their predecessors assumed towards theories that have since taken their place among the acknowledged verities of science. Of a truth, there is a point beyond which scepticism lands its victim in the very wildest credulity. Let us see how far this contention can be borne out by appealing to a few typical examples.

There is a medium seated in a chair, in full daylight, her knees gripped by a well-known man of science (one of the exceptions to his class), her feet held by two others who are stretched full length upon the floor, her hands immersed in two glass vases of water, and her whole person connected with a delicate apparatus of precision so constructed as to set a peal of electric bells ringing on the slightest motion of any of her limbs. Under these conditions, a table rises to the certified height of twenty-five centimetres from the floor, remains for three minutes in the air, and then sinks slowly upon its four feet again.

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All this occurs in the presence of several witnesses. The testing scientists are De Gramont, De Rochas, and Sabatier.

There are, we are told by Sir William Crookes, at least a hundred recorded instances of the levitation of Mr. Home ; "and I have heard," he adds, "from the lips of the three witnesses to the most striking occurrence of this kind—the Earl of Dunraven, Lord Lindsay, and Captain Wynne—their own most minute accounts of what took place. To reject the recorded evidence on this subject is to reject all human testimony whatever ; for no fact in sacred or profane history is supported by a stronger array of proofs." We may remark in this connexion that two explanations are given of this phenomenon by Theosophical experts. It is sometimes produced by the agency of materialized hands, and sometimes by calling into play a certain power of repulsion, which counteracts the force of gravitation. - The secret of doing this is only known to occultists.

Once more. A man is passing down a

what proof have we that he was not a  
sceptic but a practical  
fowler.

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street on his way to a séance. He is a sceptic.  
Entering a stationer's shop he purchases a  
double slate, the two halves being joined by  
a hinge of leather; and between the slates  
he inserts a small scrap of slate-pencil. The  
whole is then tightly and securely wrapped  
up in thick brown paper and tied with string,  
the knots being fastened with sealing-wax  
bearing the impression of his own signet.  
Arrived at the house where the séance is to  
be held, he sits upon the parcel, in order to  
make sure that it runs no risk of being tam-  
pered with; then, when requested, he holds  
it, intact, under and close to the top of a light  
table, propounding simultaneously a mental  
question unknown to anybody present. A  
sound of writing is heard. When this ceases  
he withdraws the parcel, breaks the seals,  
takes out the slates, and finds, written on the  
two inner surfaces, a long and intelligent reply  
to the inquiry he had silently formulated.

Now we have selected, and confined our-  
selves to, the above types for more reasons  
than one. In the first place they come to us

Thank!

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with the personal endorsement of those few eminent scientists—such as Crookes, Wallace, Zöllner, and others—who form so honourable an exception to the great majority of their colleagues. In the second place they are conspicuously *physical* in the mode of their manifestation, thereby offering a far more tangible subject for investigation than ‘spirit-messages,’ materialized muslin, fairy-bells, and the rest of the séance-room stock-in-trade. In the third place they appeal to the man of science even more directly than they do to the religionist as such. What, then, is there to say about them? Where, and how, do they fit into the general scheme of things?

Well, the sceptic will have no fewer than three explanations to bring forward, each purporting to prove that no such phenomena ever occurred at all. He will say (1) that the whole performance was a trick, or deliberate fraud; or he will say (2) that the witnesses only thought they saw something taking place which never really did take place; or he will

say (3) that all the witnesses are liars. It is here that the credulity of the sceptic is exposed in its most blazing hues. No theory is too extravagant for him, no supposition too absurd. He will believe that shrewd, keen, sensible men, with trained scientific minds and educated powers of observation, become such imbeciles at the very moment when they are exercising those powers most intently as to be hoodwinked with the greatest ease by an ignorant woman or some vulgar conjurer. He will believe that gentlemen of illustrious name and unblemished reputation will deliberately affirm and swear that they saw a certain thing take place which they never did see because it never did take place. Or he will believe that a dozen men and women whose brains are in a perfectly healthy state passed suddenly, one and all, under the spell of some mysterious hallucination, which, affecting them all alike, caused them to imagine they saw some one particular occurrence that never happened. These gross improbabilities he will believe, but he will not believe in the



reality of any phenomenon, vouched for by whom you will, if it be a phenomenon inexplicable by any of the laws or sequences of nature with which he happens to be familiar. His greatest concession will be to say, "I will not believe unless I see these things myself with my own eyes"—implying that those organs are more to be trusted than the eyes of well-known scientists, many of whom are antagonistic to the 'spirit' theory. And even then he would probably shuffle out of it.

#### IV

The relation between the supernormal as exhibited in the phenomena we have just referred to and the supernormal as exhibited in religious systems is of course obvious. Now it is a fact as patent as the sun in heaven that, in consequence of the scientific, linguistic, and historical discoveries of the past fifty years, the centre of gravity of theological orthodoxy stands no longer where it did. In like manner I believe that the position of scepticism is also changing; that,

in fact, a change is going on in the attitude of the scientific sceptic analogous to that which has already taken place in the attitude of the orthodox believer. The believer was wont to say, "Nothing but what has been 'revealed' is intended for us to know; for, if it had been, it would have been 'revealed.' Consequently, any scientific induction which contradicts the inspired word is *ipso facto* false; and the meaning of that inspired word is what I individually take it to mean, and that is what I understand by orthodoxy." The agnostic, on his side, was equally narrow and equally uncompromising. "There are certain things we do not know, and which by the very nature of the case we cannot know; it is therefore clear that these are things which we shall never know, and the man who thinks they may be known some day is a loose thinker and a dreamer and hopelessly unscientific all round." Such, in plain terms, was the attitude of the scientific agnostic at the time that Huxley died.

Now it would be difficult to decide which

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of these two classes deserved the palm for sheer, blind, arrogant dogmatism. Each was, *au fond*, as bigoted and as unreasonable as the other, and as long as such a position was maintained no *rapprochement* of any sort was possible. But there has been a change. Discoveries of scientific fact and a critical examination of the historical books of the Bible have wrought utter destruction upon the old untenable theories of verbal inspiration, and the man who still clings to them is no longer accounted orthodox but simply ignorant. Still profounder researches into the secrets of matter and the brilliant results of experiment in psychological and hyperphysical phenomenology have in their turn shaken the materialistic position to its foundations, and the scientist who denies the possibility of penetrating behind the atom or the ion which forms for him the Ultimate Unit of matter is seriously jeopardizing his prestige. It is becoming clearer and clearer that many scientific principles hitherto regarded as axiomatic are now con-

sidered so no longer, having been relegated to the region of the contingent. The actuality of apparent gaps and hiatuses is being called in question, as their bridging over by some hitherto unsuspected agency is either suggested or proved; while continuity has been assumed in cases where it now appears more than possible that there has been a gap. The appearance of life in the chain of evolution was an insoluble mystery on materialistic lines, and so was held to be insoluble altogether; now there are symptoms that a solution is regarded as possible, and that on lines by no means wholly materialistic. I will lay no further stress on the staggering revelations marshalled in such wonderful order by Mr. Myers—revelations which, so to speak, fling a whole world of authenticated marvels from the hitherto discredited 'Unseen' full in the face of men who deny that the Unseen exists; enough that the discoveries in question have been made and systematized on the strictest scientific principles, and can no longer be

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ignored. And the result is that the agnostic spirit, purged and chastened from its former arrogance, is reappearing in a new and comelier shape ; a shape no longer bigoted and autocratic, but pliant, open-minded, even hopeful ; and this I have ventured to call the Higher Agnosticism. Surely, if it is the very madness of human pride to believe there is nothing left for us to know, that the ' Riddle of the Universe ' has been answered for all time by an obliging professor in Germany, it is the very madness of self-depreciation to assert that, whatever more there may or may not be, we are incapable of knowing it. The older agnostic was like a traveller in some mountain country, whose path had led him into a deep ravine or gorge, surrounded by towering peaks and apparently ending in a *cul-de-sac* through which there was no egress. " Look," he said, " we are shut in ; the rocks have closed around us, the gorge is nothing but a narrowing cave." But some of his fellow-travellers went on, and lo ! the path continued, and it led in and in, right up to

the very point where from a distance the crags and boulders seemed to touch each other ; and then it was discovered that they did not touch after all, and that the path went right between them, on and on continuously, and as the travellers followed it they found themselves where the light grew brighter and brighter, so that they could see the path still ahead of them leading ever onward and upward. Such are the Higher Agnostics ; and their principle is not that of the shut but of the Open Door, because the doors which looked so sternly closed to them from a certain distance were found to be only ajar when they came up and examined the locks and bolts. They are agnostics, because they accept nothing without proof, because they acknowledge their comparative ignorance and temporary limitations ; but they lay stress on the fact that the ignorance is gradually being dispelled, that the limitations are only temporary, and that no one has a right to say in the name of science, " Thus far *canst* thou go and no farther." If a solution is

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unattainable to-day, it is simply because the intermediary discoveries have not been made ; bridge over the gaps, even be it inch by inch, and when this has been done—as in some cases it has been done—the solution will be attained. The belief that is irresistible to-day may be shown to be wholly false to-morrow, and for the thousandth time it will be proved that the most irresistible belief is often the most formidable enemy of knowledge.

Look back upon the past, and judge the possibilities of the future by it. “ By induction,” says Marion Crawford, “ our fathers or grandfathers ‘knew’ that it was impossible for man to traverse the earth faster than at the speed of a galloping horse. After several thousand years of experience that piece of ‘knowledge,’ which seemed singularly certain, was suddenly proved to be the grossest ignorance by a man who had been in the habit of playing with a tea-kettle when a boy. We ourselves, not very long ago, ‘knew’ positively, as all men had known since the begin-

ning of the world, that it was quite impossible to converse with a friend at a distance beyond the carrying-power of a speaking-trumpet. To-day, a boy who does not know that one may talk very agreeably [?] with a friend a thousand miles away is an ignoramus; and experimenters whisper among themselves that, if the undulatory theory of light have any foundation, there is no real reason why we may not see that same friend at that same distance as well as talk with him. Some years ago we were quite sure that it was beyond the bounds of natural possibility to produce a bad burn upon a human body by touching the flesh with a bit of cardboard or a common lead pencil. Now we know with equal certainty that if upon one arm of a hypnotised patient we press a letter of the alphabet cut out of wood, telling him it is red-hot iron, the shape of the letter will on the following day be found as a raw and painful wound, not only on the place we selected but on the other arm, in the exactly corresponding spot, reversed as though seen in a



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looking-glass; and we very justly consider that a physician who does not know this and similar facts is dangerously behind the times, since the knowledge is open to all. The inductive reasoning of many thousands of years has been knocked to pieces in the last century by a few dozen men who have reasoned little but attempted much. It would be rash to assert that bodily death may not, some day, be altogether escaped. It is nonsense to pretend that human life may not possibly, and before long, be enormously prolonged, and that by some shorter cut to longevity than temperance and sanitation. No man can say that it will, but no man of average intelligence can now deny that it may."

With regard to the last suggestion it is safer to suspend our judgment. But I have transcribed the passage as deeming it not, wholly irrelevant to my contention. The discoveries therein referred to, the upsets of so many radical and irresistible beliefs, illustrate very aptly the immense strides that are

being made, not only in the dominion of man over natural forces, but in his knowledge of what those forces really are. It will be a very magnificent and transcendently interesting thing if, by the application to a telescope of a fifty-thousand magnifying power, we can solve the mystery of all that puzzles us in the planet Mars; but far more magnificent, far more interesting, if scientific researches, untrammelled by prejudice or ridicule, result in laying bare the occult mysteries of the Universe—the relations of mind and matter, the function of spirit in cosmical processes, the origin of life and motion, the dynamic power of concentrated thought, the secret springs which underlie and set in movement the infinite machine in which we are bound up. The Higher Agnosticism, intolerant only of intolerance, and ready to test all theories, all modes and spheres of investigation, will not disdain such assistance as may be proffered from sources hitherto discredited and condemned, so long as what may be

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called familiar and materialistic explanations are found irrelevant ; and, far from denying the possibility of what may even now appear impossible, will deem no secret too profound, no riddle too mysterious, to be absolutely beyond solution at some future day when links now wanting shall have been discovered. Agnostic the investigator will remain in respect to every problem that he has not elucidated with the utmost scientific exactitude ; but a Higher Agnostic he will be in the sense that he will look above and beyond the limitations of the present, and reach forward to that which, though now beyond his grasp, will be the prize of later generations. And within the scope of his inquiries will most assuredly come those theories or beliefs which form the rock foundations of that most important department of human life in respect to his attitude towards which the agnostic first assumed his name. There is much in Religion that is still a perplexity to all thinkers, much that we have every right, as matters stand at

present, to call in question. But there is nothing in Religion which, relying on recent triumphs, we have any right to relegate to the Forever Unknowable; neither the existence of a God, nor the possibility, likelihood, or fact of a Revelation, nor the tremendous problem of the Whence, the still more tremendous problem of the Whither. These are matters on which very profound convictions are popularly held; but no intensity of conviction is the slightest guarantee of the truth of any belief. The Low Church elderly lady who spends her time and her money in the distribution of alarming tracts has no more misgiving that her religious convictions are not the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, than she has of her own existence. And yet her certitude is not one whit greater or intenser than that of the fanatical Moslem to whom all Christians are dogs and infidels, or of the bigoted Papist to whom every non-Papist is a pestilent heretic, or of the cultured Buddhist who sees no flaw in any part of his subtle metaphysic,

or of the materialistic atheist to whom all belief in supernatural religion is the lowest of superstitions. Question any one of these five persons about the creed he holds, and the answer will be, not that he believes, but that he *knows* he is right; a curious and significant fact, when we remember that four out of the five *must* be wrong, and that the fifth is probably wrong too. From this point of view agnosticism is logically inevitable. But if it be true—as it is true—that an Indian fakir can suspend all the vital functions of his body at will, simulate death, suffer himself to be buried in the ground for weeks, and then resume his life on being disinterred, the Higher Agnosticism will acknowledge the existence of natural forces and extensions of human power which have not yet been co-ordinated, and recognise the fact that the word ‘impossible,’ outside of mathematics, has no place in the vocabulary of the wise. “In some things,” says Bacon, “it is more hard to attempt than to achieve; which falleth out when the difficulty is not so much

in the matter or subject, as it is in the crossness or indisposition of the mind of man to think of any such thing, to will or to resolve it; and therefore Titus Livius in his declamatory digression, wherein he doth depress and extenuate the honour of Alexander's conquests, saith, *Nihil aliud quam bene ausus vana contemnere*. In which sort of things it is the manner of men first to wonder that any such thing should be possible, and, after it is found out, to wonder again how the world should miss it so long." And in the years which lie before us there will be consummated that "happy match" between the secrets of nature and the mind of man which the great Elizabethan philosopher did so much to bring about.

